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# A BROKEN ALTAR AND OTHER SERMONETTES



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A BROKEN ALTAR  
AND OTHER SERMONETTES



# A BROKEN ALTAR

AND OTHER SERMONETTES

PREACHED IN HINTON CHURCH

BY

FREDERICK HARPER, M.A.

RECTOR OF HINTON-WALDRIST, FARINGDON

*"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me."—OUR LORD.*

*"Without the Way there is no going; without the Truth there is no knowing; without the Life there is no living. I am the Way which thou oughtest to follow; the Truth which thou oughtest to trust; and the Life which thou oughtest to live for."*

—THOMAS À KEMPIS.

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## PREFACE

A RECENT writer remarked that about two hundred years ago authors put everything they could into their books—they packed them full, like travellers' trunks. I have tried hard to leave out things irrelevant to the subject in hand, and to say what I wish in as few words as possible. "We believe," said the late Dr. Charles Bigg, "a great deal more than is contained in the primitive creed, and these later additions are the cause of our divisions." And not only is that so, but also I think a large amount of modern unbelief is due to the failure to distinguish between the essence and the accidents of the Christian Faith. I have done my best in the following pages not to lay emphasis on things that are not emphatic.



# CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. A BROKEN ALTAR . . . . .	I
II. THE HEAVENLY VISION . . . . .	6
III. THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD . . . . .	12
IV. THE PALACE OF THE SOUL . . . . .	15
V. THE BIRTHDAY OF CHRIST . . . . .	17
VI. "LITTLE GIRL, GET UP!" . . . . .	21
VII. HOW TO SUCCEED IN PRAYER . . . . .	24
VIII. THE WORLD'S GREATEST TEACHER . . . . .	27
IX. THE SORROWFUL DREAM . . . . .	31
X. GOOD FRIDAY . . . . .	35
XI. THE VOICES OF EASTER DAY . . . . .	39
XII. THE VEILED STRANGER . . . . .	42
XIII. THE MYSTIC KEYS . . . . .	45
XIV. "FOLLOW THOU ME" . . . . .	50
XV. THE HEART AND THE TREASURE: THOUGHTS FOR ASCENSION DAY . . . . .	53
XVI. A MISSIONARY FORECAST . . . . .	56
XVII. AT THE GATE BEAUTIFUL . . . . .	60
XVIII. HOLIDAYS . . . . .	63
XIX. A PRAYER THAT ALWAYS PREVAILS . . . . .	66
XX. THE HARVEST FESTIVAL . . . . .	70
XXI. THE FRIENDSHIP OF CHRIST . . . . .	74
XXII. THE SABBATH BY THE RIVER . . . . .	77
XXIII. PREVENTING GRACE . . . . .	82
XXIV. TRUST AND DO . . . . .	86

	PAGE
XXV. THE IMPREGNABLE ROCK . . . .	90
XXVI. THE COMPASSION OF CHRIST . . . .	92
XXVII. THE GREATEST COMMISSION . . . .	95
XXVIII. "I HOLD AND AM HELD" . . . .	98
XXIX. "SORROWFUL, YET ALWAYS REJOICING" . . .	101
XXX. THE GOLDEN SECRET . . . . .	105
AN ESSAY ON SERMON-MAKING . . . . .	109
INDEX OF TEXTS . . . . .	119
INDEX . . . . .	121

## A BROKEN ALTAR

*And he went out, and wept bitterly.*—ST. MATTHEW  
xxvi. 75.

THOSE of you who have learned to love George Herbert may remember his delightful little poem—"The Broken Altar." I will read it to you.

"A BROKEN ALTAR, LORD, THY SERVANT REARS,  
MADE OF A HEART, AND CEMENTED WITH TEARS :  
WHOSE PARTS ARE AS THY HAND DID FRAME ;  
NO WORKMAN'S TOOL HATH TOUCH'D THE SAME.  
A HEART ALONE  
IS SUCH A STONE,  
AS NOTHING BUT  
THY POWER DOOTH CUT.  
WHEREFORE EACH PART  
OF MY HARD HEART  
MEETS IN THIS FRAME,  
TO PRAISE THY NAME :  
THAT IF I CHANCE TO HOLD MY PEACE,  
THESE STONES TO PRAISE THEE MAY NOT CEASE.  
O LET THY BLESSED SACRIFICE BE MINE,  
AND SANCTIFY THIS ALTAR TO BE THINE."

St. Peter's heart was just like George Herbert's "Broken Altar." Let us, from St. Matthew's Narrative only, (though the scene is painted in all the Gospels), first note the steps by which St. Peter fell. In verse 33 he boasts of his fidelity—"Peter answered and said unto Him, Though all men shall be offended because of Thee, yet will I never be offended." In verse 40 he is found sleeping instead of watching—"And He cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with Me one hour?" In verse 56 he forsakes his Lord—"Then all the disciples forsook Him, and fled." In verse 58 he follows afar off—"But Peter followed Him afar off." In verse 70 he denies his Lord—"But he denied before them all, saying,

I know not what thou sayest." And so he fell, from one downward step to another. One of life's failures passionately exclaimed, "An awful thing it is for a man to be down! When a man falls there is nothing worse in life than that!" "Yes, there is," some one replied. "What?" "Why, not getting up again!" was the answer. It has been well said:—"If thou fallest seven times a day—yea, seventy times seven—but, as often as thou fallest, risest up again, and, seeking pardon and mercy, renewest thy struggle with deeper humility and more fervent prayer, it shall be well with thee at last."

Now let us learn how St. Peter rose up and reared his broken altar.<sup>1</sup> St. Matthew tells in verse 75—"And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly." Wondrous is the force of tears. J. R. Green, who wrote that picturesque *History of the English People*, finds the noblest scene in English history when Edward I. faced his subjects in Westminster Hall, and with a sudden burst of tears owned himself frankly in the wrong. Tears of a strong man broke the heart of a proud people, and re-established a throne.

David (says Dr. Alexander Whyte) is the prodigal son of the Old Testament. His 51st Psalm is the most pathetic wail that ever came from a human heart. "Cleanse me from my sin," he cries. He blames himself—not his circumstances, not his environment, not heredity, not the force of temptation, his sin is his own, his own fault, his own most grievous fault. But his penitence reaches its very lowest point when he realises the truth of what he says in the fourth verse, "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned." He had sinned against man, he had sinned against woman, but the inwardness of his sin was that it was only against GOD.

I wonder whether David was called a man after God's Own Heart because he was so lowly in his penitence, or

<sup>1</sup> St. Luke alone records that "the LORD turned and looked upon Peter" (xxii. 61). There were three causes which brought that swift change of mind. (1) The Prayer of Christ. (2) The Love of Christ expressed in His Look. (3) The crowing of the cock.

because he always gave God the glory (2 Sam. xxii. 36),<sup>1</sup> or because his mouth was full of praise and he would sing songs of thanksgiving in his most desperate straits? (Ps. lxiii. 3).

Next, I will ask you to hear what Bishop Andrewes, the great Wet-Eyes of the English Church, says in one of his tearful prayers from the midst of "the broken altar":

"Lord, break not the bruised reed; quench not the smoking flax; let not the waterflood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up, and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me. Lord, all my desire is before Thee, and my groaning is not hid from Thee. Thou knowest, Lord, that I say the truth in Christ, and lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart, because I have thus sinned against Thee; that I am a burden to myself, in that I cannot sorrow more; that I beseech from Thee a contrite heart, groanings that cannot be uttered, tears of blood."<sup>2</sup>

When I was an undergraduate at Oxford there was a far-famed Master of Balliol, Benjamin Jowett. People said he had the face of an angel, certainly he was one of the most accomplished men in Europe—for fifty years he lectured on Plato. But what do you think he sometimes called one of his Sunday books? *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, by John Bunyan. Let us hear what that gracious and great author says in Benjamin Jowett's Sunday book:

"And now my heart was, at times, exceeding hard; if I would have given a thousand pounds for a tear, I could not shed one; no, nor sometimes scarce desire to shed one. I was much dejected to think that this should be my lot. I saw some could mourn and lament their sin; and others, again, could rejoice, and bless GOD for Christ; and others, again, could quietly talk

<sup>1</sup> In contrast to David note Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel iv. 29-32: and Herod in Acts xii. 21-25. And note the further contrast between the doom of Herod and the Word of God. How the Bible scorns these marionettes who dance for a little while on the world's tawdry stage.

<sup>2</sup> Private Devotions of Lancelot Andrewes.



of, and with gladness remember, the Word of GOD, while I only was in the storm or tempest. . . . I should, therefore, much bewail my hard hap; but get out of, or get rid of, these things I could not."

I advise you to put *Grace Abounding* among your Sunday books, and also among your every-day books, and with *Grace Abounding* put the *Pilgrim's Progress* and the *Holy War*. The Puritan tinker is certainly among the immortals, and he sits on a throne judging the tribes of men. Bunyan is one of the greatest religious teachers of the world, and if any one constantly reads his entrancing pages one thing is sure, he will be kept from trifling. He will say, like Ned Bratts in one of Browning's Idyls:

"His language was not ours :  
'Tis my belief, GOD spake :  
No tinker has such powers."

Who can doubt that he received "the ordination of the pierced Hands"?

What do you say to all this? To David's cries for mercy: to Peter's bitter tears: to George Herbert and his broken altar: to Bishop Andrewes and his prayer for tears of blood: to John Bunyan's "a thousand pounds for a tear"? The heart of Scribe and Pharisee in our Lord's time was hard, for it lacked the power to weep. Some years ago one of the richest men in New York lay on his dying bed. He asked his attendants to sing for him. They sang the old familiar hymn—"Come, ye sinners, poor and needy."<sup>1</sup> Then the dying millionaire said in a plaintive tone, "Yes, please sing that again to me. I am 'poor and needy.'" Fifty millions of railway securities and bank stocks, and yet "poor and needy." But it is surely "a token for good" if we really feel ourselves "poor and needy," because then our poverty and need is met at once by "the unsearchable riches of Christ," which are freely given to every one that believeth.

<sup>1</sup> Any educated person would see at once that this hymn by Joseph Hart ("Come, ye sinners, poor and wretched") is not poetry at all. Yet I hardly know where—outside the Bible—you would find a more beautifully simple presentation of the Evangel of Christ. It is the golden core of all true Theology.

But you may say, "I am not poor and needy; I have never shed a tear for sin in my life, I don't feel a bit sorry for anything I have done wrong, what am I to do?" You are to come to Christ just as you are, without one plea, making no excuses, you are to ask Him to look on you as He looked on Peter, and to pray for you as He prayed for Peter;—you are to join the Pilgrim in the never-to-be-forgotten story at the foot of The Cross, and the Three Shining Ones will come to greet you. I was lately reading a Sermon on Nicodemus by a living preacher, and he said—"It was Calvary with all its pathetic beauty and melting tenderness, that broke down the last barrier and removed the last doubt, and made him a disciple indeed."<sup>1</sup> Yes, it is always so, it is Calvary, it is always Calvary, which makes us disciples indeed.

<sup>1</sup> Rev. J. G. Greenhough.

## THE HEAVENLY VISION

*And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon ; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel : and the Holy Ghost was upon him.—ST. LUKE ii. 25.*

THERE are many charming Parables and Narratives and Songs and Pictures only to be found in St. Luke. As to Parables, the Lost coin, the Lost son, the publican in the Temple, the Good Samaritan—there is only one Story in the world more beautiful, and that is of course the Story of Bethlehem and Calvary—then there is the woman who was a sinner, and the dying robber, all these are told by St. Luke, the most evangelical of the evangelists. St. Luke is the great poet<sup>1</sup> of the Gospel, and he gives us the three sacred songs—the Magnificat, the Nunc Dimittis, the Benedictus. And the portrait of Simeon as St. Luke paints him is a delightful picture. “There is nothing,” says Socrates to Cephalus in the *Republic*, “I like better than conversing with aged men. For I regard them as travellers who have gone a journey which I too may have to go, and of whom it is right to learn the character of the way, whether it is rugged or difficult, or smooth and easy.” And Browning says—

“Grow old along with me !  
 The best is yet to be,  
 The last of life, for which the first was made :  
 Our times are in His Hand  
 Who saith, ‘A whole I planned,  
 Youth shows but half ; trust GOD : see all, nor be afraid.’”

---

<sup>1</sup> The tradition that St. Luke was a painter is not found before the sixth century. In the thirteenth century he appears as the patron saint of painters. There is no reasonable doubt that he was a physician (Col. iv. 14), and he certainly was a most accurate writer, indeed, being a physician he had been trained in habits of accurate observation. Any one who was able to record with such demonstrable accuracy the adventure of a shipwreck as he does in Acts xxvii. must be a man worthy of credit.

And Keble reminds us—

“Ever the richest tenderest glow  
Sets round the autumnal sun,  
But there sight fails, no heart may know  
The bliss when life is done.”

Mrs. Barbauld's lines are pretty well known—

“Life! we've been long together,  
Through pleasant and through cloudy weather;  
'Tis hard to part when friends are dear;  
Perhaps 'twill cost a sigh, a tear;  
Then steal away, give little warning,  
Choose thine own time;  
Say not 'Good-night,' but in some brighter clime  
Bid me 'Good-morning.'”

Simeon was waiting for “the Consolation of Israel.” That is one of Christ's famous Titles. Virgil knew the “tears of things,” but he knew no comfort. In recent years a letter has been found, probably about 1900 years old, at Oxyrhynchus in the valley of the Nile. It is a letter of condolence written by a Greek lady to a friend after a bitter bereavement, and concludes with these words: “I shed many tears, but still there is nothing one can do in face of a sorrow like yours, so I leave you to comfort yourself. Farewell.” Only “the Consolation of Israel” can dry such tears as these.

i. “*The Holy Ghost was upon him.*” There is the secret of all the faith and sweetness of this winsome old man. “And it was revealed to him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ” (verse 26). He was to see the Face of Christ before the last shadow fell. Simeon had been taught of GOD. He understood that salvation was in a Person. He could have said with St. Paul, “I know Whom I have trusted.” And therefore, He shed unconscious sweetness, and has wielded unconscious influence, for men have wished not simply to be in his place, but what is far better, to be in his spirit.

ii. *He tells his experience.* One use of old age is to bear witness. “Mine eyes have seen Thy Salvation.” The eye is not satisfied with seeing till it sees Christ. But when we have seen Christ, then the Face of Christ comes between us and the last shadow, and He will

lead us to that place where no shadows fall. To every one who has seen that radiant Face we may say :

“Death will come upon thee very gently as a friend,  
Who comes into the house at eve when the day is at an end.”<sup>1</sup>

iii. *He thought of others.* Christ is to be Light and Glory—“a Light to lighten the Gentiles,” the souls that sit in darkness in the sad pagan world, and also to be “the Glory of Thy people Israel,” Gentile and Jew are covered with his blessing.

iv. *“He blessed God.”* If we have seen the Face of CHRIST we have cause to bless GOD. For we cannot have too high thoughts of Christ, nor too great expectations from Him. “We ought not to think mean things of our Salvation; for when we think mean things of Him, we expect also to receive mean things.”<sup>2</sup> And indeed for us to live and die never having seen this vision, it would have been better for us never to have been born.

There are always new discoveries to be made of the glories of Jesus. He spoke to Saul of Tarsus of “the things wherein thou hast seen Me, and of the things wherein I will appear unto thee” (Acts xxvi. 16), and on that Matthew Henry says, “Christ now settled a correspondence with Paul, which He designed afterwards to keep up, and only told him now that he should hear further from Him.” He was not to live on a past experi-

<sup>1</sup> In his book *The Acts of the Holy Ghost* Dean Pigou relates that when he was at St. Philip's, Regent Street, he was dangerously ill, very near death. “I was overwhelmed,” he says, “with the conviction that I was dying unsaved, not because of some sin not confessed and therefore not forgiven, but it was borne in upon me that I had never, by a lively faith, accepted Christ as my personal Saviour. I had preached about Him but I had not preached Him, simply because I did not ‘know Him Whom to know is life eternal.’ . . . The prayer of the aged Simeon was mine, constantly, persistently, that the light of the Holy Ghost, for which I had long and earnestly prayed, might some day visit my soul and turn the darkness into light. In 1871 we had a ten days' Mission at Doncaster, a year memorable to myself because of the blessing it brought me. . . . It pleased GOD that night (December 7) to reveal His Son in me, and to give me ‘joy and peace in believing’” (pp. 36-40). The Mission was mainly conducted by Mr. Aitken of Pendeen, and Mr. Haslam and one or two more assisted. Pigou had made up his mind not to be present on a particular evening. Haslam persuaded him to go lest his absence might be commented on. That night (Dec. 7, 1871) the blessing came.

<sup>2</sup> From the so-called Second Epistle of St. Clement.



ence. "I will see you again," said the Saviour. If we have once seen the Saviour we may expect to see Him again and again and *again*. As He said, "A little while, and ye behold Me not," that is with your bodily eyes, "and again a little while, and ye shall see Me," that is when the Holy Spirit shall reveal Me to you (St. John xvi. 19). [Our Lord uses two different words, the first apparently refers to physical sight, depending on the bodily organs, the second to preception independent of the bodily organ, that is, spiritual vision.]

If you carefully study the characters in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, you must have been struck with the sunset splendours<sup>1</sup> that encircled all the pilgrims at their journey's end. Dr. Arnold of Rugby used to say he could never read the closing pages of that book without tears.—Of how Christian began to sink, and, crying out to his good friend Hopeful, said, "I sink in deep waters; the billows go over my head, all His waves go over me." . . . "The sorrows of death have compassed me about," I shall not see the land that flows with milk and honey. And with that a great darkness and horror fell upon Christian, so that he could not see before him. Also here he in a great measure lost his senses, . . . and feared he should die in that river and never obtain entrance in at the gate. . . . But Hopeful would endeavour to comfort him, saying, Brother, I see the gate, and men standing by to receive us; but Christian would answer, It is you, it is you they wait for; you have been hopeful ever since I knew you. And so have you, said he to Christian. . . . Then Hopeful added these words, Be of good cheer, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole. And after that Christian broke out with a loud voice, Oh, I see Him again;<sup>2</sup> and He tells me, When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee. . . . And then ten thousand welcomes on the other side as if Heaven itself was come down to meet them, and all the bells in the City ringing again for joy,

<sup>1</sup> Ruskin in one of his letters thanks "Susie" for not writing on mourning paper, and adds, "Why should we ever wear black for the guests of God?"

<sup>2</sup> "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away," but as John Donne said, the Lord hath not taken Himself away.

and how it was said unto them, "Enter ye into the joy of our LORD." . . . And after that they shut up the gates : which when I had seen, I wished myself among them.

Here too, are some tender thoughts, indicating another line of experience :

"What are the thoughts of our beloved at such a time? We have seen them, perhaps, as we watched by the bed, lie silent ; not sad nor troubled, but as if interested and deep in thought ; and we have wondered to see how the things of earth, even its important things, have lost all importance for them. Can we not guess, in part at least, what are their thoughts then ? If they look back upon life the vision cannot be fair as His was, however fair we may think it they see its faultiness now. Thinking of it, they say, 'Nothing in my hand I bring.' . . . And if our friends look forward at such a time, we need not wonder at their calm, happy silence. The life that Jesus brought to light is not fully nor clearly revealed, but we have glimpses of it, and there are words of revelation that suggest much. Certainly to depart and be with Christ is to lose nothing that is of the best. We mourn over the departure of those we love, grieving that they could not be spared to us a little longer. How often is that the bitterness of death ! Here is the lovely spring when the light is sweet and the flowers appear—the flowers they loved : oh, that they might have seen them again, we say. Or the summer is nigh, with warmth and brightness which might have wooed them back to life had they but felt it again. Or the autumn for which they had toiled and sowed, the time of fulfilment was almost come, when they might have reaped peace and comfort hitherto unknown. But now these joys are not for them. The home which was so much to them, as they were to it, and the fellowship which they prized, and the service in which they delighted, shall know them no more. So we speak to ourselves, grieving as for their loss. Oh, foolish heart ; do you not remember how all these things fell away from them ? That which they thought of at the last is very far better. They look upon scenes fairer than all that our eyes behold ; they taste pleasures purer and more satisfying than all that we know. They go to a home, even as



they leave one. They find a fellowship better than that which they lose. There is service for His servants yonder, higher and worthier than all that there is here. That life and this are bound each to each, are made one in a beautiful continuity. To pass from one to the other is in itself no trial but rather the fulfilment of all the highest hopes : 'to die is gain.' Those who have such thoughts for the last mortal hours, it is no wonder that they should be silent then. . . . Life ceases to interest : death ceases to terrify. The heart troubles no more : Christ is all. Silence at the last is common in Christian experience. We sometimes mourn over it ; we long for last words of testimony and reassurance as well as for words of farewell. Yet silence then may mean not less than speech does, but more. It may mean a faith that is unconscious of the fear which is in our minds ; a faith that simply and wholly rests ; the faith with which a child lays its head upon the pillow at night. Then

‘The soft dews of kindly sleep,  
The wearied eyelids gently steep’ ;

And the waking is heaven.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Silent Christ*, by late Rev W. W. Sidey.

### III

## THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

*I am the Light<sup>1</sup> of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the Light of life.*—ST. JOHN viii. 12.

ARCHBISHOP TRENCH tells us, in his book on Proverbs, that there are certain short Texts, to which the Spaniards were accustomed to give the name of Little Gospels. This verse is a "Little Gospel." It contains the essence, the golden core of God's gracious Evangel.

It was in the morning when the light was fading from the great lamp-stands of the Temple which were lit at the Feast of Tabernacles and the sun was rising in the east, that Christ said, I am the Light of the world. The old book of devotion *The Imitation* opens with these very Words. Like a clarion they had aroused and inspired its author. I do not wonder, for according to the New Testament, CHRIST is Christianity. To believe in Him, to love Him, to obey Him, is the whole duty of the Christian. Our Lord is always pointing to Himself. Whenever the pronoun is used in Greek it is used for emphasis. Now in the Gospel of St. Matthew our Lord uses the pronoun (ἐγώ) I 15 times: in St. Mark 9 times; in St. Luke 10 times; in St. John no less than 117 times, and in 35 out of those 117 in distinct assertion of His Own claims. Do you not see that "Christ is everything"? (Col. iii. 11). St. Chrysostom compares Christ to a fire from which ten thousand lamps are kindled but which burns as brightly as before.

It was a very dark time when Christ came. The

<sup>1</sup> Ten great Words St. John applies to Christ. The Word: The Light: Bread: Water: The Vine: The Life: The Way: The Resurrection: The Door: The Good Shepherd.

world was black with evil ; it was bankrupt in faith and in morals. Matthew Arnold's description is perfectly true—

“ On that hard Pagan world disgust  
And secret loathing fell ;  
Deep weariness and sated lust  
Made human life a hell.  
In his cool hall, with haggard eyes,  
The noble Roman lay ;  
He drove abroad in furious guise  
Along the Appian Way ;  
He made a feast, drank fierce and fast,  
And crowned his hair with flowers—  
No easier nor no quicker pass'd  
The impracticable hours.”

Light is the emblem of knowledge. And the Lord Jesus brought the knowledge of the true God. “ No man hath seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, Who is in the Bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.”

All light is wonderful. GOD is “ the Father of lights ” for He kindles it all. He “ covers Himself with light as with a garment.” The light visits the meanest cottage, as well as the grandest palace. The sunlight is the world's greatest painter, for it scatters beauty broadcast over the wide earth, it is the great artist that paints all pleasant pictures.

*Light gladdens.* “ Truly the light is sweet and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun ” (Eccles. xi. 7). Then how glad are those eyes that see Christ, that Picture of everlasting beauty.

*Light guides.* “ The Lord is my light,” said the Hebrew Psalmist. And again, “ In Thy light shall we see light.” And again, “ O send out Thy Light and Thy truth : let them lead me.” And again, “ They looked unto Him and were lightened, and their faces were not ashamed.” The Christian life is a life of looking—for pardon, for help, for inspiration, for power. The light follows the look.

At a critical point in the deliberations of the Westminster Assembly a young man who had been observed to write notes on a piece of paper rose to speak. His speech produced a marvellous result. All were eager to

see the notes. They found the paper and on it were written three words, "Da lucem, Domine!"—Give light, O LORD! And when the light is given "follow the gleam."

*Light guards.* Basil Wilberforce tells how one hot June evening, on the banks of the Hudson River, in America, he was watching the fireflies dancing like fairy lamps against the deep blue-black of the sky. Now and again one would flare up with exceptional brilliancy. His companion told him they were being attacked by a hostile insect, and that then their sole protection was to let their light shine with a keen brilliancy to discomfort and dazzle the adversary. If they failed in this, they fell victims.

The most interesting study in the world is the struggle of a soul to find the light. The light comes sometimes suddenly as a lightning flash, in others it is like the sunrise of a summer morning. St. Paul's defence was his life-story: he had seen a great light, and heard a Voice.

Christ says, "I am the Light of the world." He also says to His disciples, "Ye are the light of the world" (St. Matt. v. 14). The Church is to shine as the spiritual lighthouse because His Light is within. Christians should be lenses so placed as to receive and transmit His Light. "Heaven doth with us as we with torches do: not light them for themselves." The candle is not lighted to illumine itself. If we are light, we must shine.

About 400 years ago there lived a man in Italy, by name Correggio, who wished to do something for the world that would not die but live to the glory of GOD. He painted a picture of the Christ-Child and the Mother for a little obscure chapel among the olives and vines near his home. The face of the Virgin Mother as she bent low over her Babe was fair and lovely, but it was the Face of the Child which held the people spellbound, and has been a wonder and a joy ever since. For from that Face there streamed a warm and hallowed light which lighted the face of the Mother as she bent over the Holy Child, and it shed a radiance over the whole picture. The village people called the artist Ariel, the light-bringer.

## IV

# THE PALACE OF THE SOUL

*When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils.—ST. LUKE xi. 21, 22.*

THERE is an innate love of tales and stories in the human heart. Our Lord understood that. He knew that "truth embodied in a tale may enter in at lowly doors." The key to the interpretation of this Parable hangs by the gate. The palace is the soul of man. The strong man armed is Satan. The stronger than Satan is Christ the Lord. The author of the *Holy War* says the town of Mansoul lies "just between the two worlds." Yes, that is so: "between the two worlds," inconceivable heights above it, inconceivable depths below. It has five gates: ear-gate, eye-gate, mouth-gate, in short, the five senses as we say. In expounding the Parables you must make for the one point or points Christ meant to teach, and take the rest as the drapery of the story, here the special point is, the power of Christ to expel the devil from his dominion over the human heart. The black forces of evil besiege this once beautiful palace. In myriad shapes the tempters come—sometimes even as angels of light. In Orvieto Cathedral in Italy there is a fresco by a great Italian painter which represents the appearance and triumphs of Antichrist. He is represented as "no dreadful monster, but a most grand dignified figure, with just a faint suggestion of Him of Whom he is the rival; noble in look and form till you look into the face, and then the wickedness discloses itself: and he is surrounded with groups of the same stateliness or beauty, and with a profusion of rich and beautiful things, but with nothing that openly suggests badness—only worldliness and its temptations, till you



look to the background, and there, persecutions and bloodshed are going on.”<sup>1</sup> The spiritual world is no dream, it is a great reality, as everybody knows who has learnt to pray with William Law, “Drive, I beseech Thee, the serpent and the beast out of me.”

Four words, Bishop Wilberforce said, comprised the law of the spiritual life—admit, submit, commit, transmit. Let us take these words in order.

i. *Admit*. “Behold, I stand at the door and knock” (Rev. iii. 20). In our ignorance and folly and in our sin we have barred the door against Him lest He should spoil our pleasures. Woe worth the days we have listened to the voice of the great tempter, and have said, “To-morrow,” and when the morrow came have said again, “To-morrow.” Yet He is knocking still.

“Admit Him, for the human breast  
Ne’er entertained so sweet a Guest.”

ii. *Submit*. That is, obey. “Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it.” George Eliot put these words in the mouth of Savonarola, “The good is not a thing of choice : it is a river that flows from the foot of the invisible throne, and flows by the path of obedience.” To submit is to sign away your freedom, and become the slave of Christ, and then to find to your daily joy that to be the slave of Christ is to be free indeed.

“Make me a captive, LORD, and then I shall be free ;  
Force me to render up my sword, and I shall conqueror be.”<sup>2</sup>

iii. *Commit*. That is, to put everything that concerns you into the Hands of God. “Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.”

iv. *Transmit*. Read the Parable of the Pounds in St. Luke xix. 12 ff. All who profess to be Christ’s servants are entrusted with a pound, that is all have the Gospel of their Master, and the Gospel is to be used not only to mould their own characters and direct their own life, but it is to be shared with others : and the reward is regulated according to the diligence displayed. Where the diligence is different the rewards are different.

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters of Dean Church*, pp. 318, 319.

<sup>2</sup> George Matheson.

# V

## THE BIRTHDAY OF CHRIST

*But last of all He sent unto them His Son. . . .*

—ST. MATTHEW xxi. 37.

YES, He has come

“to whom in ancient time  
The lyre of Hebrew bards was strung,  
Whom kings adored in songs sublime,  
And prophets praised with glowing tongue.”

There is the striking fact that millions of kindly letters and millions of kindly gifts have been sent this week because a Child was born at Bethlehem, and because eastern sages brought their gold, frankincense and myrrh to His Feet, nineteen centuries ago. That child was the surprise of history; not the evolution, but the contradiction of His age. If you take the life of any saint or hero you will see how he was moulded and influenced by his surroundings, or as we say, by his environment. But with regard to our LORD, there was next to nothing in His age or home or surroundings to account for Him. The world has had many a teacher, many a poet, many a conquerer, many an empire-builder, many a philosopher, but only one Christ.<sup>1</sup> And Christmas Day is the Day set apart by the Western Church for the contemplation of His great act of condescension. “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. viii. 9, R.V.). “When Thou tookest upon Thee to deliver man: Thou didst not abhor the Virgin’s Womb.” In St. Luke the Story comprises 128 verses from chapter i. verse 5 to the end of the second chapter. The glory of the Incarnation is revealed, not in Christ being born among the poor, because the distinction between rich and poor is only known on earth, but in His becoming Incarnate at all.

<sup>1</sup> “Come what may in the future, Jesus will never be surpassed.”—RENAN.



And certainly if the Story of the Birth of Christ had been invented, the author would not have chosen a poor and lowly village maiden for His Mother, or a manger for His Birthplace. His Mother would have been a Queen, and the Cradle would have been wreathed with flowers.

i. *Christmas is the Festival of the Christ.* Heaven has been opened. Angels sing. Men listen. Heaven and earth meet together. A great writer once said, "To have no sense of the invisible is the ruin of art." It is the ruin of everything. Here man is in touch with the spiritual world. The explanation is this—"The LORD GOD of Israel . . . hath visited and redeemed His people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David; as he spake by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since the world began. . . . The Dayspring from on high hath visited us" (St. Luke i. 68-71, 78). You remember those striking words of St. Paul in 2 Cor. ix. 15. He wrote, "Thanks be unto GOD for His —": he wanted to find a word which was adequate to express the Glory of Jesus. Isaac Watts had much the same feeling when he wrote his hymn, "Join all the glorious names." But St. Paul could find no word in all the Greek language to express his meaning,<sup>1</sup> he had, as we say, to coin a word, and he wrote "unspeakable Gift." "Thanks be unto GOD for His inexhaustible Gift." That is a better rendering, for it implies a Gift we can never find the end of, and never enumerate all its contents. This Gift transcends all other gifts. And every soul that receives this Gift has a mission to make known this inexhaustible Gift to others. For Christ brings a Gospel with Him. A Gospel which is not man's invention, but God's revelation. Yea, more, Himself is the Gospel. The word Gospel occurs in the New Testament (as verb or substantive) more than seventy times, and it always means glad news, or joyful annunciation. It is

"The joyful news of sin forgiven,  
Of hell subdued, and peace with Heaven."

Thackeray, the great novelist, died on Christmas Eve

<sup>1</sup> Cf. "When ye glorify the Lord, exalt Him as much as ye can; for even yet will He far exceed: and when ye exalt Him, put forth all your strength, and be not weary; for ye can never go far enough" (Ecclesiasticus xliii. 30).

1863, after writing the words—"And my heart throbbed with an exquisite bliss," in his unfinished novel *Denis Duval*. If you receive God's inexhaustible Gift to-day, your heart too will begin to throb with an exquisite bliss, for you will taste the sweetest Christmas joys that never change from year to year.—It may be that these lines of Whittier's express the feelings of some of you :

"Father ! I may come to Thee  
Even with the beggar's plea,  
As the poorest of Thy poor,  
With my needs and nothing more.

For myself alone I doubt ;  
All is well, I know, without ;  
I alone the beauty mar,  
I alone the music jar.  
Yet, with hands by evil stained,  
And an ear by discord pained,  
I am groping for the keys  
Of the heavenly harmonies."

If you are sincerely groping for those keys you will find them all at Bethlehem and Calvary.

ii. *Christmas is the Festival of the Home*. It is the season for family gatherings, for delightful games, for innocent merriment, for Christmas cards, and Christmas gifts.

"We sigh for the touch of a vanished hand,  
And we think ourselves sincere,  
But what of the friends that about us stand,  
And the touch of the hand that is here?"

iii. *Christmas is the Festival of Peace*. It is the time to heal all quarrels, to knit together severed friendships, a time to pray for a spirit of love and conciliation, a spirit of tenderness for the feelings of others, and a readiness to forgive and forget. As St. Paul so beautifully puts it—"Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice : and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's Sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. iv. 31, 32). The central idea of Botticelli's beautiful Nativity was "Peace on earth." The olive was conspicuous everywhere, boughs of it in the angels' hands, garlands of it on the

shepherds' heads. It was a true idea, for it is wholly Scriptural: the great artist painted from his own experience, for great was the peace the Incarnate Saviour had brought to his troubled soul.

"Let the Child Jesus, the true Santa Claus, carry us into a fairy realm of innocent delight, where love's sweet kisses and hope's evergreens shall give us a foretaste of that everlasting home, which keeps festival for ever, and where the heart is always young."<sup>1</sup> "The heart must ring Thy Christmas bells."—May GOD give us the child-like heart!

[Who can help loving Virgil for his fourth Eclogue?—Virgil, the Christian heathen, as he has been called. He sings how the beloved Child of the gods would be born and bring the golden Day, cancelling guilt and introducing joy and peace, when the lion would dwell with the lamb. Then he wishes he might live to see Him, and longs for genius to proclaim His Glory—not even Orpheus should surpass him. We love Virgil for his gentle, mournful moods,—like ourselves, he knew "the tears of mortal things," and seemed to have in no small measure the spirit of brooding human pity so rare in those days. But most of all, we love him for Eclogue iv.]

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. J. G. Greenhough.

## VI

### “LITTLE GIRL, GET UP!”

*And He took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, TALITHA CUMI; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise.*—ST. MARK V. 41.

ST. MARK'S Gospel is the earliest, and the simplest, and the most picturesque of the Four: one scene follows another in quick succession. There would seem to be at least seven Miracles granted in response to the prayer of relations or friends.

- (a) The nobleman's son.
- (b) The daughter of the Syro-phœnician woman.
- (c) The centurion's servant.
- (d) The palsied man.
- (e) The man deaf and dumb.
- (f) The blind man of Bethsaida.
- (g) Jairus' daughter.

Some of Christ's Miracles were Miracles of power, as for instance, the walking on the sea. Others were miracles of pity. The Miracles of pity impress us most. It is a delightful thought that the strongest Being in the universe is the most gentle. "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. He telleth the number of the stars; He calleth them all by their names" (Ps. cxlvii. 3, 4). And God shows His almighty power most chiefly in showing mercy and pity. "Thy gentleness hath made me great," said the Hebrew Psalmist (Ps. xviii. 35). "My heavenly Father awakened me with a kiss," said Cæsar Malan. Christ is the Revelation of the gentleness of God. Men came to Christ, not because He was an Artist in speech, and said lovely things in an unforgettable way, or because he was a Doer of heroic deeds, but it was His sympathy which attracted the wretched, and His compassion which never failed. Do not think it cost Him nothing to heal. There

is not anything that exhausts and drains soul and body like active sympathy. When He wrought His Miracles of love and pity it meant a heavy expenditure of nervous and spiritual force. I have read that one of the leading London surgeons always operating on men, once said he was obliged to leave all his work and go right away every six weeks. Learn

i. *The homeliness of Christ.* From St. Matthew ix. 9 ff. it would appear that our Lord was at a feast which St. Matthew gave in His honour when Jairus came to Him, but He left the feast when the little maid was dying, for He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and He always put duty before pleasure. St. Mark has preserved the very Words Christ used—"Talitha cumi." They are Aramaic, a dialect of Hebrew then in common use. They simply mean, Little girl, get up! just as her mother might have called her every morning. The Lord can speak in your own language, in the very words you have heard from childhood. When Holman Hunt ventured to represent Christ in the carpenter's shop, some of the piety of the time was outraged, but the working men of the north crowded to see the Shadow of the Cross, and saved their money to buy the two-guinea plates.

ii. *The tender consideration and thoughtfulness of Christ.* When He raised the widow's son at Nain, as soon as he began to speak He delivered him to his mother. Lazarus had his grave-clothes on, and Jesus said, Loose him, and let him go. And when He restored Jairus' daughter He "commanded that something should be given her to eat." He knew exactly what was wanted. He provides for the tender life of the waking child.

iii. *Christ cares for the earthly concerns of His people.* It was Christ Who taught us to say, "Give us this day our daily bread." All the four Evangelists tell the Miracle of the loaves.

iv. *How much more for their spiritual needs.* He bids them feed on Him: "I am the Bread of life."

Two more thoughts:

(i.) *The power of Christ's Hand.* He took her by the hand. One of Wellington's officers was commanded to

go on some perilous duty, and he lingered a moment, as if afraid, and then said, "Let me have one touch of your all-conquering hand, and then I can do it." It is the Touch of Christ's Hand that makes saints and inspires courage and strength.

(ii.) *The power of Christ's Word.* "His Word was with power" (St. Luke iv. 32). It rang out like bells of joy—"Little girl, get up!" To-day it wakes dead souls (Eph. ii. 1). To-day it reaches the hearts of young men and maidens, old men and little children.



## VII

### HOW TO SUCCEED IN PRAYER

*If ye abide in Me, and My Words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.*—ST. JOHN xv. 7.

It would seem that one object of St. John's Gospel was to supplement the Memoirs of Christ written by the other three Evangelists. Here is a Parable which you only find in St. John. It has been well said that—"To the Parable of our LORD there is nothing in all language to be compared for simplicity, grace, fulness, and variety of spiritual teaching."<sup>1</sup> But in interpreting them you must seize the central truths, and avoid pressing details which are merely the colouring or draping of the tale. The great central point here is the union between Christ and His people. It is not simply nearness: the Words "in ME" express the closest mystical union between the Christian and his Lord.

The Saviour emphasised the necessity of prayer (*a*) by pattern. For He Himself would often go apart in order to speak with God.<sup>2</sup> And besides, He gave His disciples a model Prayer. He also emphasised it (*b*) by Parable. In the Parable of the importunate widow we learn the duty of persevering prayer for ourselves. In the parable of the friend at midnight we are taught the privilege of intercessory prayer for others—in private, in public, and when we come to Communion. Our Saviour also taught the same lesson (*c*) by Precept. "Ask and it shall be given you."

But oh! what a difference there is in the way in which Christ looked at prayer and the way in which we regard it! And His disciples too, they "continued" in prayer: they watched unto prayer: they laboured in prayer.

<sup>1</sup> Bruce.

<sup>2</sup> "Every Church must have its porch, so every prayer should have its few moments of silent recollectedness before we enter into the Sanctuary of the Presence of GOD."—JAMES VAUGHAN.



In verse 5 we are taught how to succeed in service. "He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing." In verse 7 we learn how to succeed in prayer. "If ye abide in Me, and My Words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." [St. John used the most restful and profound word "abide," the word he used when he had his first interview with Jesus—the A.V. in this chapter translates it abide, dwell, continue, remain.] There is a twofold abiding. If we are to succeed in prayer we must

i. *Abide in Christ.*<sup>1</sup> He is our Saviour, our Life, our Teacher, our Guide. And we may be sure

"No power shall sunder ever  
Hearts that in Christ abide."

"Up amongst the Perthshire hills a stream on its way to the sea takes at a certain place a leap over a great rock into a deep, dark pool. Day and night, summer and winter, that pool is full to overflowing. Why? Because day and night, summer and winter, that stream from the hills falls into it and feeds it. This Apostle writes in another place, *To me to live is Christ*. There he tells the secret of his exhaustless energy and unflagging zeal; for there is no possible meaning of those words which does not imply a life that abounds. And if any one should ask again by what means he may attain to this, how rise superior to weakness, how cast off lethargy, how have peace when he suffers and joy while he serves, how have strength for all duty, and not life only but life abounding, we remind him of those words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, *Abide in Me*. For that abiding involves abounding."<sup>2</sup>

ii. *We must have His Words abiding in us.* Then, we may ask what we will and it shall be done. The response to our prayers will be beyond all ranges of

<sup>1</sup> The vine at Hampton Court Palace was planted in 1769 and is one of the largest in Europe. It has been known to yield over one thousand bunches in fruitful seasons. No one could understand its extraordinary harvest until at last it was discovered its roots had reached the flowing waters of the Thames. And then the wonder ceased, for one of the most dreaded diseases of the vine is said to be caused by exhaustion of the soil.

<sup>2</sup> Late Rev. W. W. Sidey.

human thought. We shall find prayer to be the wireless telegraphy of the soul which never fails. "They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength." Lord Rosebery said of Samuel Johnson : "There is a human majesty about him which commands our reverence, for we recognise in him a great intellect, a huge heart, a noble soul. He lived under grievous torments, in dread of doubt, in dread of madness, in terror of death, yet he never flinched ; he stood four square to his own generation as he stands to posterity." Why ? Samuel Johnson had learned to pray. A man once went to a minister in very great distress. What should he do ? Why don't you pray about it ? Pray, no, said the man, that would be to yield the whole matter. Exactly—to pray is to yield your will to God's Will. "And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His Will, He heareth us" (1 St. John v. 14). But there is a law of God's spiritual kingdom, that what begins in Prayer ends in Praise.

"When thou hast thanked thy God for every blessing sent,  
What time will then remain for murmur or lament ?"

"Without ME ye can do nothing." May He come to us, speaking pardon, breathing peace !

## VIII

# THE WORLD'S GREATEST TEACHER

*Never Man spake like this Man.*—ST. JOHN vii. 46.

SOME people feel this difficulty—How could the Words of Christ have been remembered with sufficient accuracy for our Gospels to be trustworthy? Now we know the Israelites were able to read and write before they settled in Canaan, so it is perfectly certain that people in the time of our LORD could do so. Of course the greater part of the teaching in the East was oral, and the Parables were easily remembered, and most likely notes were taken. In any case it is clear that the Gospels were all written within the first century: none earlier than about A.D. 60, and none later than between A.D. 80 and 90, because they reflect the thoughts and ideas of that particular time.

St. John has left us three priceless pictures: of Christ, in his Gospel, of himself, in his Epistles, of the Church, in the Revelation.

“Never man spake like this man.”

i. *They are incomparable Words.* Christ called His Teaching Good News: it was *Good*, because it made the mourner sing, it was *News* because it had never been heard before. Sometimes in the Gospels we can almost hear the gasp of astonished listeners. Max Muller well said—“If you would know the distinction of the Bible, compare it with the other sacred books of the East.” India gave Buddha; China, Confucius; Greece, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle; Rome, Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius; but Christ is removed from all these, as far as the east is from the west. St. John iii. 16 is the greatest sentence in literature. Christ's Words come with the freshness of the morning, with the brightness of spring, and brim all over with tender, human sympathy. They

are like diamonds, with countless facets, which flash and sparkle from every point of view. They create character, they inspire all that is beautiful and true, they are the source of all strength and peace. When we read His Words we forget He was a Jew, born in the East. Shakespeare could never have sprung up in France, for he was the expression of Elizabethan England, Victor Hugo is French through and through, but Jesus speaks in our own language in which we were born. If these Words do not find you out—well then, I *despair* of you, because you respond not to love. “Never man spake like this Man.”<sup>1</sup>

ii. *They are living Words.* They are “Words of eternal life” (St. John vi. 68). “The words of St. Paul,” (said Luther) “are not dead words; they are living creatures, and have hands and feet.” But that description is infinitely truer of the Words of Christ. He toned down the great Voice of GOD which was too loud for men to hear—it only sounded like thunder (St. John xii. 27–30). Alexander the Great had always under his pillow a small silver casket which contained nothing but his lifelong copy of Homer. If Alexander treasured his favourite poet thus, how ought we to treasure the Teaching of Jesus! A certain father was advised in order to reclaim his wayward boy to hang the Face of Hoffman’s Christ in his son’s room. That is doubtless a pathetic piece of sacred art, but I would hang up in the boy’s room as well some Text that came from His Lips Who spoke as never man spake, and pray God’s

<sup>1</sup> “I hear not Moses now. To me he is of stammering lips. Isaiah’s lips are unclean. Jeremiah cannot speak; he is a child. All the prophets are mute. *‘Ipse, ipse, quem loquuntur, ipse loquetur.’*”—ST. BERNARD.

It would seem that our Lord had favourite Sayings as well as favourite Books. Such as, “I will have mercy and not sacrifice” (St. Matthew ix. 13; xii. 7). It is quoted from Hosea vi. 6. Mercy is an attribute of God, to show mercy is to imitate Him, therefore mercy is the perfection of Divine service, for kindly help rendered to man is more acceptable to GOD than the exact performance of any ritual. Here are others of His favourite Sayings—“The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord.” (St. Matthew x. 24, 25; St. Luke vi. 40; St. John xiii. 16; xv. 20). “For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath” (St. Matthew xiii. 12; see also St. Matthew xxv. 29; St. Mark iv. 25; St. Luke xix. 26). “But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first” (St. Matthew xix. 30; xx. 16; St. Mark x. 31; St. Luke xiii. 30).



Holy Spirit to give him "a hearing heart" (1 Kings iii. 7-9, margin R.V.). John Knox, when dying, summoned his friend to his bedside and said, "Read to me." His friend read St. John xvii. ; when he came to the Words, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil," Knox said, "That is the text where I first cast anchor." Yes, put one of Christ's immortal Sayings in your boy's bedroom, it may be he will cast anchor there ! I admire Charles Dickens because of his deep love for Christ, and because he is not ashamed to show it when he can find a chance. This is certainly exceptional in a great novelist, and I do not wonder he wrote to his son, Edward Bulwer : "I put a New Testament among your books . . . because it is the best Book that ever was or ever will be known in the world, and because it teaches you the best lessons by which any human creature who tries to be truthful and faithful to duty can be guided." And Renan was certainly right when he said—"There is no book which has dried so many tears as the New Testament."

iii. *They are final Words.* He was conscious of speaking the last and decisive Word. "I say unto you," that was one of His characteristic expressions. His unique Personality gives to His Words their abiding authority. Take the Sermon on the Mount in St. Matthew v., vi., vii. It is evident that the first impression made on the multitude by Christ's preaching was a feeling of the Personal authority with which He spoke. He widens, or modifies, or repeals, Laws which they all acknowledged to be Divine. In that Sermon five cases are given illustrating the authority He claimed over the former Law. "Last of all," God "sent His Son," and He is the crown and end of Revelation. We do not contend that every one of Christ's Sayings had never been said before, but he put new life and light into them—He found them wayside pebbles, He transformed them into gems. I do not compare Christ with any one because He is incomparable. But as an illustration, take Shakespeare, the greatest and most original of English poets : he finds some sordid old ballad—"A lamentable song of King Lear and his three daughters"—

and by his genius the old ballad becomes a masterpiece. Shakespeare borrows from all sides, but he knew a good thing when he saw it, and did not hesitate to use to the full anything that suited his purpose.

“Christ took the word Father that He found. Christ breathed upon it with the breath of life. Christ lit it with the light that He had seen when He moved in heaven before His Father’s Face. And from that hour the Fatherhood of GOD has been a truth so mighty and so comforting, that life is different, and death is different, and Heaven shall be different for evermore. It was not new, yet Jesus made it new.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> G. H. Morrison.



## IX

### THE SORROWFUL DREAM

*And while he was sitting on the judgment-seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that righteous Man: for I have had a terrible dream this day because of Him.—ST. MATTHEW xxvii. 19.*

THE dream of Pilate's wife is one scene in the account which sacred history paints in the assize of the ages. And it is a very striking fact indeed, if we consider it thoughtfully, how all sorts and conditions of men, both Jew and Gentile, are compelled to give their verdict. Pharisees and Sadducees, Caiaphas the high priest, Pilate the governor, Pilate's wife, the women of Jerusalem, Roman soldiers, dying robbers, the centurion who had charge of the Crucifixion all the day, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea,—in short, all the people passed their judgment and gave their verdict.

The Gospel of St. Matthew gives a great place to dreams in Divine direction, as we may gather from the following passages: i. 20; ii. 12, 13, 19, 20. It has been well said that "if we lived nearer to God in our waking hours perhaps we should have more of His communications in sleep. We might sleep always at Bethel, and walk every day by heavenly direction."<sup>1</sup> Sir Thomas Browne, in his essay on Dreams, asks, "Who can therefore wonder that Chrysostom should dream of St. Paul who daily read his Epistles?" Chrysostom's daily reading of the Epistles resulted in dreams of their author in the night seasons, because our waking thoughts very often no doubt prompt our dreams. If we think much of Christ by day, that Divine and radiant Figure may appear

<sup>1</sup> Robert F. Horton.

to us at night, so that we may desire to be able to say with Ray Palmer :

“Like some bright dream that comes unsought,  
When slumbers o’er me roll,  
Thy Image ever fills my thought,  
And charms my ravish’d soul.”

This sorrowful dream of Claudia Procla, for that, history says, was her name, stands alone in St. Matthew. She is the only Roman woman mentioned in the Gospels. But I am sure she is among those “whose names are in the Book of life,” the Book of the living ones.

“The next night Christiana had a dream; and, behold, she saw as if a broad parchment was opened before her, in which was recorded the sum of her ways; and the crimes, as she thought, looked very black upon her. Then she cried out aloud in her sleep, Lord, have mercy upon me, a sinner! and the little children heard her. After this, she thought she saw two very ill-favoured ones standing by her bedside, and saying, What shall we do with this woman? for she cries out for mercy, waking and sleeping; if she be suffered to go on as she begins, we shall lose her as we have lost her husband. Wherefore we must, by one way or other, seek to take her off from the thoughts of what shall be hereafter, else all the world cannot help but she will become a pilgrim.”

God can speak in dreams: Goethe said his grandfather had revealed to him, in dreams beforehand, some of the principal events of his life.

Archbishop Alexander points out the great contrast between verses 19 and 20. In the *but*<sup>1</sup> of verse 20 “there is the wonder of a silent shame, the eloquent shudder of a suppressed horror. ‘So did the Roman woman; but the chief priests and elders (O the strangeness and the pity of it!) persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas.’”

i. *Here was grace.* Preventing grace, grace going before, grace abounding, for what but grace could make her so different to her husband? Pilate the agnostic was proud and arrogant, and the high-minded and

<sup>1</sup> It should be “but” in verse 20, not “now” as R.V. The “but” of the A.V. is certainly right.

haughty never learn "the secret of the LORD." The Hebrew Psalmist wrote—"The meek will He teach His way." GOD has two thrones, one in the highest heaven, and the other in the lowly heart, but the proud He knows afar off. Besides, Pilate tampered with his conscience, and he did not act up to the light he had, "for he knew that for envy they had delivered Him" (St. Matthew xxvii. 18). Pilate put his own interests first, and shrank from the risks of doing right. George Eliot speaks of "fatal moments." These were "fatal moments" for Pilate. He asks, "What is truth?" and never waited for an answer (St. John xviii. 38). So when he asked, "Whence art thou?" Jesus gave him no answer (St. John xix. 9). But the grace of God had made Pilate's wife so different—she could have sung that verse of the Christian hymn—

"Go, then, earthly fame and treasure,  
Come disaster, scorn, and pain,  
In Thy service pain is pleasure,  
With Thy favour loss is gain."

ii. *Here was reverence.* Reverence has been defined as "the feeling which accompanies the recognition of worth in others." Ruskin remarked that reverence was the most desirable and the least desired virtue of our age.—Certainly, God's Holy Spirit had given to Pilate's wife a revelation of the beauty of Christ.

iii. *Here was compassion,* which even slipped into her dream.

iv. *Here was courage.* For she might have been severely punished for sending a message to a judge, with intent to sway his decision. I do not wonder the Greek Church includes Pilate's wife in its calendar of saints.

v. *Here was love.* True, she only called Him "that just Man." But the Holy Spirit had shown her some of the things of Christ, and she responded to His loveliness, and was convinced of His innocence. The beauty of Christ's Character appealed to her not in vain and she was willing to risk her life for Him. Behold how she loved Him!

What is *your* verdict?

"There is a solemn silence when a final verdict is pronounced in the hearing of men. There is a more awful silence in the soul when a final verdict is passed on Christ. It is broken always either with the low cry of the lost, or with the song of one who has been set free—for ever."<sup>1</sup>

"You seem, sir," said Mrs. Adams to Dr. Johnson, in one of his gloomy hours, when the fear of death lay heavy on him, "to forget the merits of our Redeemer." To which Johnson made answer, "Madam, I do not forget the merits of my Redeemer; but my Redeemer has said that He will set some on His right hand and some on His left."—For, remember, according to your verdict on Christ, whether it is for Christ or against Him, in this short earthly life, will be your place in the eternal world.

<sup>1</sup> *The Day of the Cross*, by W. M. Clow.

## X

### GOOD FRIDAY

*They watched Him there.*—ST. MATTHEW xxvii. 36.

"EVERY year there are holidays on which a kindly-hearted man is glad to see the many thousands of bread-winners, whose lot is one of hard work, laying work aside, and eager for recreation. Those who live in large towns crowding our parks, our museums, and picture galleries, or filling our excursion-trains, that they may breathe the air of the country, or stroll by the seaside. Those who live in quiet villages flocking to our large towns, for livelier scenes and sights. Such a man is glad to see the merry thousands of our lads and girls in high spirits at their games. But there is one day—not a working-day—in the year, when this sight shocks and saddens us.

"That day is GOOD FRIDAY."<sup>1</sup>

William Law said, "The greatest sinner that any one knows is himself." If that is our feeling about ourselves we shall find rich blessings at the foot of the Cross to-day: the Cross will teach us more than all the libraries of the world to-day if we could read them all, and more than all the sights of earth if we could see them all.

i. *The Cross is a revelation.* It is a revelation of the Love of GOD. "When we have gazed upon the Face of Christ, there are a thousand things we may still doubt; but there is one thing we can never doubt again, and that is the love of GOD."<sup>2</sup> If there were no Calvary, how should we know that God is love? Modern science has unfolded a universe of which our fathers never dreamed. It is clear that God is great. "He telleth the number of the stars" (Ps. cxlvii. 4). The Cross

<sup>1</sup> Late Dr. J. C. Miller.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. G. H. Morrison. Compare Tennyson's words in his poem on the old romance—

"O love, thy kiss would wake the dead!"



teaches us the love of God. But the Cross is also a revelation of the sin of man. About a hundred years ago two Sermons were preached on the same day in St. Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh. The morning preacher (Robertson) said—"If a perfect Model of purity and truth and love were to come down from Heaven to earth, the whole world would bow down before Him and would worship Him." The evening preacher (Erskine) said—"A perfect Model of purity and truth and love *has* come down from Heaven to earth, and they nailed Him to a Roman cross; they cried out, Crucify Him, Crucify Him!" It is only when I measure my sin by the Cross that I see how hateful it is.

ii. *The Cross is a reconciliation.* Dr. Thomas Goodwin said that reconciliation is the main argument of the Bible. St. Paul teaches us a good deal about this. Take for instance Romans v. 10, 11, in R.V.—"For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son,<sup>1</sup> much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life; and not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation." Here are four distinct truths: "we were enemies": "we were reconciled," the Cross is God's judgment of sin and God's remedy for sin: "we shall be saved by His life,"—"Because I live ye shall live also"—

". . . living, dying, let me bring  
My strength, my solace from this spring;  
That He who lives to be my King,  
Once died to be my Saviour."<sup>2</sup>

"We also rejoice": no wonder, for reconciliation means restoring to conciliation or friendship.

As you "watch" listen to His dying Words.<sup>3</sup> They

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Chalmers has left it on record that it was his habit daily to renew his interest in the Sacrifice of Christ for him. It is certainly helpful to say every day with a glad surprise, and an overflowing heart of gratitude—"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." This is infinitely better than trying to live on a past experience.

<sup>2</sup> Dora Greenwell.

<sup>3</sup> The vinegar mingled with gall (St. Matt. xxvii. 34), or as St. Mark says, "wine mingled with myrrh," was offered to our Lord *before* the Crucifixion. It was intended to deaden the pain. He took the cup in His hands, for he was always courteous, but "when He had tasted thereof, He would not drink." He would not have His senses drugged, or His mind clouded. The



are fifty words in English. His first thought is for those who murdered Him. These Words show us that Jesus is Divine if nothing else does. Next, He speaks peace to the dying robber. His third thought is for loved ones He was leaving. From the fourth Sentence it would seem Christ felt the desertion which sin brings, for the penalty of sin is to be forsaken of God. He realised the utter loneliness of sin, and He realised it for us.<sup>1</sup> His fifth Word shows He was suffering the extremity of human pain. His sixth was "Finished," and on that hangs all our hope. "Jesus has done it all" were the dying words of Dr. McNeile. . . . At last he commits His Soul into his Father's hands.

St. Paul speaks of Justification and Sanctification : St. Peter of pardon and holiness : St. John of forgiveness and cleansing. They all mean the same thing. It is—"By His stripes we are healed." And, thank God, "the plaster is as wide as the wound," as Matthew Henry said.

George Herbert has a Poem which he called "The Bag," very touching and very beautiful. The Saviour's Wounded Side is compared to a sacred receptacle, or Bag, in which we put our requests, and He will present them to His Father, and add His Own merits to our imperfect petitions. All this is only another way of saying, "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." The Poem begins—

"Away, despair ; my gracious Lord doth hear,"

and the last two stanzas are—

"If ye have anything to send or write,  
 (I have no bag, but here is room)  
 Unto my Father's Hands and sight  
 (Believe me) it shall safely come.  
 That I shall mind what you impart ;  
 Look, you may put it very near My Heart.

sponge filled with vinegar and put on a reed was offered just before He died and was a sop to cool the fever of His tongue. These two should be carefully distinguished. He refused the first because He would not offer His great Sacrifice with wandering brain and what a lesson He gives besides of self-denial.

<sup>1</sup> "Sin is never so dreadful as when we see the Saviour with blood upon His garments. And the Saviour Himself is never so dear, never wins so utter and so tender a love, as when we see what it cost Him to save us."—PHILLIPS BROOKS.

“Or if hereafter any of my friends  
Will use Me in this kind, the door  
Shall still be open ; what he sends  
I will present, and something more,  
Not to his hurt. Sighs will convey  
Anything to Me. Hark, despair, away.”

Savonarola saw a vision of two crosses suspended over Florence. One was “the Cross of the Pity of GOD,” the other “the Cross of the Wrath of GOD.” They are both in the Cross of Christ. Christ offers forgiveness, full and free, here and now, to the worst of sinners. But if that is refused, then that man shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him. Christ says, “This thy day.” “You must spring into the boat when the wave rolls upon us its greatest swell,” said the captain to his wife ; “the next second will be too late.” For “there is a tide in the affairs of men,” as Shakespeare said. A great novelist speaks of “fatal moments”—they are “fatal moments” when Christ is rejected for the last time, and the Holy Spirit takes His everlasting flight.

## XI

### THE VOICES OF EASTER DAY

*She, supposing Him to be the gardener, saith unto Him, Sir, if thou have borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away.*—ST. JOHN xx. 15.

THERE are few pictures in art or literature so touching as the lone figure of Mary<sup>1</sup> pleading with Jesus Whom she supposes to be the gardener to tell her where he has laid her Christ. She is a picture of utter desolation, weeping distracted tears. Over and over again, with mournful iteration, she says, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him." First to St. Peter and St. John, then to the two angels, (St. John xx. 13), and now, in a direct form to the Saviour Himself. But really I do not wonder Mary was thus dazed and distracted, for the Saturday before the Resurrection was the saddest day the world ever saw. All her dearest, sweetest hopes were in the dust. Not a star shone in her sky. Even her faith was eclipsed: almost everything seemed to be dying or dead. But one thing survived—the thing which no floods can drown, which is stronger than death, and that was love. We know but little of the life beyond, but love is not lost.

It is perfectly clear Mary had no expectation of an immediate Resurrection, for she brought the spices for the dead Body. She never dreamed of the angels of the Resurrection, or the empty grave. The dead Christ was more to her than all the living world. Remember this, my Christian friends, if ever your faith is clouded, that love still links you to your Saviour, and love is greater than faith, and your faith will revive, (for He Who gives it always takes care of it), and you will regain your lost Lord and your lost Bible too.

"Touch me not," or more accurately, "Do not cling

<sup>1</sup> Modern scholars do not follow the Latin Fathers in identifying her with "the woman who was a sinner" in Simon's house.

to Me,<sup>1</sup> for I am not yet ascended to My Father, but go and tell. . . ." The old earthly relations have passed away, that the new spiritual relations may begin.

Our Lord had often told His disciples that He must die and rise again the third day but they had forgotten. He had often quoted a verse from the Psalter and referred it to Himself. The text was this—

"The Stone which the builders refused is become the Head Stone of the corner" (Ps. cxviii. 22). That verse from the Easter Psalm is repeated many times in the New Testament. We have it in St. Matt. xxi. 42 :—"Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The Stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the Head of the corner : this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?" And in St. Mark xii. 10 :—"And have ye not read this Scripture ; The Stone which the builders rejected is become the Head of the corner?" And St. Luke xx. 17 :—"And He beheld them, and said, What is this then that is written, The Stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the Head of the corner?" And Acts iv. 11 :—"This is the Stone Which was set at nought of you builders, Which is become the Head of the corner." And also note 1 St. Peter ii. 4 :—"A Living Stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious." I was reading that when the Temple was being built, one day the labourers dragged up a huge block of unusual size and shape, but for some reason the builders refused the giant boulder. At a certain angle of the wall, where a heavy gable of the Temple was to rest, a niche was discovered which required a stone of unusual shape and extraordinary strength. The rejected stone filled the space. What was known among the Jews

<sup>1</sup> Mary was clinging to Christ. "Therefore in His reply Christ said : 'Do not cling to Me, as if in that which falls under the senses you can know Me as I am ; for there is yet something beyond the outward restoration to earth which must be realised, before that fellowship towards which you reach can be established as abiding. *I am not yet ascended to the Father.* When that last triumph is accomplished, then you will be able to enjoy the communion which is as yet impossible. . . . Meanwhile, this is the reward of thy love, that thou shalt bear the message of the coming and more glorious change to those to whom thou didst bear the tidings of what seemed to be thy loss and theirs.'"—Westcott on St. John, vol. ii. p. 345.

To put it more simply. "Do not cling to Me, for I am not yet ascended to My Father." The "yet" leaves the blessed inference that *when He had ascended* not only she but all His brethren might touch or cling to Him by faith.

as "the blunder of the builders" became a proverb, and then a prophecy of Him Who was despised and rejected of men, but at last became the Chief Corner Stone.<sup>1</sup>

Stanley as he stood on a Judean hill seemed to hear a voice which said, "He is not here, He is risen." It was a true inspiration. It is the message of Easter Day. Think of what changes the first disciples passed through in some forty-eight hours. How else can any one account for those changes except by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead?

And St. Paul writes of being "risen with Christ." I expect some of you have read the story of the eagle stolen from its nest by hunters in the Tyrol. They reared it amongst the fowls, and as its wings grew, the hunters clipped them short till it sickened and nearly died. After that they neglected it, and its pinions slowly grew. One still summer day there came a cry from far up in the sky, so faint that only an eagle could hear it. The captive heard it, and, spreading its wings, rose from the ground, in ever-widening circles, higher and higher, over trees, over mountains, into the clear blue, to join its kindred in the sky.

If any of you feel your soul cleaving to the dust, ask yourself this—If Christ could save and bless and comfort when on the Cross, how much more can He save and bless and comfort now on His Throne? And this: If Christ could save and bless and comfort when He was dying, how much more can He save and bless and comfort now He is living?

And ask yourself too those questions in Browning's grand poem on Easter Day—

"How was my case now did I fall  
Dead here this minute? Should I live  
Faithful or faithless?"

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Fullerton tells of a certain Robert Lockhart, a well-known lay preacher in Edinburgh, whose style was quaintness itself. He had formerly been a soldier, and was accustomed to relate a story of two soldiers, companions of his, who were condemned to die. Both left him a legacy. As to the first " . . . I didn't get the legacy," the preacher used to say, "because the man did not die." In the second case, the relatives disputed the will, as there was a little quibble in the wording of it, so, said he, "I lost this legacy, because the man didn't live to make plain what the meaning of it was." The adroit application, combining the two stories, was that "Christ has died, and I get the legacy; Christ lives, so no man will be able to dispute it, for Christ will make it plain."—*Gospel Pictures in Bible Stories*, p. 104.



## XII

### THE VEILED STRANGER

*Jesus Himself drew near, and went with them.*—ST. LUKE xxiv. 15.

YOU may have seen a picture something like this:—Three figures, clad in Eastern garb, sitting at a table engaged in a meal. The central Figure is in the act of breaking bread, and the two others are looking at Him with growing wonder and a dawning sense of recognition as if they were just beginning to realise Who it was that had broken bread in their midst. It is a picture of the evening meal at Emmaus. The incident is full of spiritual enchantment. Cowper<sup>1</sup> says in one of his letters that he had been intimate with a man of fine taste, who had confided to him that though he could not subscribe to the truth of Christianity itself, he could never read this passage of St. Luke without being deeply affected by it, and feeling that if the stamp of divinity was impressed upon anything in the Scriptures, it was upon that passage.—Certainly the Gospel of St. Luke is the most beautiful Book in the world, but then that Book enshrines the most beautiful Character in the world.

The two friends believed in “the communion of saints.” In *The Pilgrim's Progress* how much help Christian received from the companionship of Hopeful. And Dora Greenwell's description of such holy fellowship is very beautiful :

“Then, too, I had many companions, playmates, and work-fellows, whose looks, whose voices had been dearer to me than aught by the brook or in the forest. Some-

<sup>1</sup> Cowper's friend showed very great literary skill in saying what he did of the Easter walk to Emmaus. In one of his leisurely Introductions, Scott asserts that “supernatural machinery” breaks down in fiction. Euripides seemed to guess as much, for Alcestis is silent when she returns to earth. The address of the ghost in Hamlet is an illustration of the truth of Scott's remark. The fact is, St. Luke narrates, Shakespeare and Scott had to create.



times we had read together in the Book ; sometimes we had knelt and prayed together in the clear evening light. We loved each other ; we shared together many innocent secrets, many joys and tears, many thoughts that we passed, as in a torch-race, from hand to hand ; the light that dawned upon one heart would grow to day in another."

It was between seven and eight miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus : the country was picturesque, but these two disciples had no eyes for the beauty that surrounded them. And now the afternoon was well worn and the warm sun was gliding on towards the golden west. These two disciples had left Jerusalem after St. Peter's return from the sepulchre, and before Mary Magdalene hurried in with her tidings, "I have seen the Lord." They had been on Calvary, and seen death—and such a death. The last look of the dying One—the last Words—could they ever forget ? And the wanton insult of the spear-thrust in His Side. Then the hurry and confusion of the Burial.<sup>1</sup> "We trusted. . .": What a world of woe lies all untold in the two final letters of that word. And besides this very day the report that the LORD had been seen. . . .

Jesus comes to those who think about Him. Jesus comes to those who talk about Him. The two friends were talking of Calvary. There is a well-known incident of Thackeray walking to the west of Edinburgh, and seeing the wooden crane of the quarry standing out, as if etched upon the sky, and so placed as to assume the figure of a cross. Thackeray and his three companions gazed at it silently. "As they gazed, Thackeray gave utterance, in a tremulous, gentle, and rapid voice, to what all were feeling, in the word 'Calvary.' His friends walked on in silence, and then turned to other things. All that evening he was very gentle and serious, speaking, as he seldom did, of divine things—of death, of sin, of eternity, of salvation—expressing his simple

<sup>1</sup> "There are few things that bind hearts together in such tender friendship as a fellowship in suffering. You may bind two pieces of metal together by the strongest cords, may rivet them so firmly that they seem but one piece, yet a strong wrench will tear them asunder. But weld them together in the same fierce fire and you can never separate them more. It is the same with human hearts."—Rev. J. G. GREENHOUGH.

faith in GOD and in his Saviour.”<sup>1</sup> We may compare the words in the Hebrew prophet—Malachi iii. 16, 17. And there is another thing : Jesus appears when His people are most sad (verse 17). Their hearts were as heavy as lead, and they spoke in low quavering tones. They were bewildered with sorrow and hard by the gates of despair. But lo ! He comes, and the darkening twilight becomes as the dawn of the summer morning, and at once they gain strength to hope, to struggle, and to triumph. He points them to the Bible for comfort, and teaches them that Christ’s Sufferings must come before His Glory (verse 26). Then was fulfilled the ancient Saying, “As one whom his mother comforteth so will I comfort you.” You know the tenderness of a true mother for her sick or troubled child : her warm sympathy, her untiring love. So Jesus comforts : only infinitely better. If you are sad and sorrowful, or it may be disappointed, fear not, the Great Consoler is here. You say—

“My faith burns low, my hope burns low,  
Only my heart’s desire cries out in me,  
By the great thunder of its want and woe  
Cries out for Thee.”

And your heart will not cry in vain.

For remember this : every true Christian is a new proof of the Resurrection. Nothing less than a risen Christ could make one. Here is the best proof of all, that Christ is not dead but alive. If you had asked St. Paul how he knew Christ rose on Easter Day, I think his most convincing argument would have been that he himself had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken to him, and from that moment his whole life had been changed.

We may suitably conclude our Easter meditations with a prayer of Bishop Andrewes—

“Abide with us, for it is towards evening,  
And the day of our life is far spent.  
Thou Who givest evening to be the end of day,  
Whereby to bring to our mind the evening of life,  
Grant me always to consider that like as the day, so life flieth past,  
And to remember that the night cometh when no man can work.”

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in *The Cross in Christian Experience*, by W. M. Clow, B.D.

## XIII

# THE MYSTIC KEYS

*I have the keys of death and of Hades.*—REV. i. 18, R.V.

EASTER DAY is a day of gladness and of triumph. It always comes with a glad surprise, like some sweet summer morning after a night of pain: the fairest morning follows the blackest night. It tells of the victory of Love. Those who cannot rejoice on Easter Day *miss* a great deal. "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the LORD." There is joy in the air. We have never greater reason to sing, "Thanks be to Thee, O LORD," than for the Easter Gospel. For the best Easter Gift is the Gift of a living Saviour freely given to every one that believeth.

Listen to a voice out of the far-off Middle Ages—"Happy the hour when Jesus calls you from your tears to joy of heart. How parched, how hard you are without Him; how empty and unwise if you want anything beyond Him. Would not the loss of Him be greater loss than if the whole world went from you? Apart from Him, life is a grievous hell; with Him a pleasant garden. If He be with you, no enemy can hurt you. He who finds Jesus finds a treasure rare, a jewel above all others. And he who loses Him, is losing, ah, so much, much more than all the world. Without Him man is but a beggar; with Him a prince."<sup>1</sup>

The narratives of the Resurrection in the Gospels were not made in collusion, for in that case there would be no differences. On the other hand, they could not be independent, imaginary narratives, for then there would be no points of agreement.<sup>2</sup> Different accounts,

<sup>1</sup> Thomas à Kempis.

<sup>2</sup> Some of the points of agreement are these. (a) None saw Jesus rise. (b) Angels appeared at the Grave and told the women, and their story was not believed. (c) Our Lord appeared first to Mary Magdalene.

even by those who were present, have been given of the battle of Waterloo, but there is no doubt such a battle took place. Many of the Epistles of St. Paul were written before the Gospels, (such as the two letters to the Thessalonians, the Galatians and Romans, and the two to the Corinthians, the genuineness of which is not denied—they were all written between 50 and 60 A.D.), and in those Epistles it is clear that the Resurrection of the Body of Christ on the third day was the belief of the whole primitive church. The point was not whether His Spirit survived death—the Pharisees would have admitted that. The question was the Resurrection of His Body. Why did not His enemies produce It? There is but one answer. Because they could not. The dying martyr turns to CHRIST with a prayer, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts vii. 59). That prayer bears witness to St. Stephen's belief in CHRIST'S Resurrection and Lordship over life and death. A dying man would never cry to a dead Christ who could not save himself. Since Christ had risen St. Stephen's prayer was just what we should expect.

In the long white garment reaching down to His Feet, and in the broad golden girdle, (the symbol of royalty), bound round His Breast, we have the picture of the Priest-King. The whitened hair symbolises the truth that Jesus Christ is The Ancient of Days, the First and the Last, from everlasting to everlasting. The other particulars in the description show how all power is given to him in Heaven and on earth.

He holds in His Hands the mystic keys. He has—

i. *The keys of Death*.—That means He conquered death. At the siege of Calais the chief citizens came out to carry the keys of the town to the English conqueror. When the sun set on the first Good Friday, it seemed as though the Life of Christ had ended in despair. The Church and her Christ expired together, and they rose together on Easter Day. The Catacombs at Rome are underground passages of great extent—it is said that if put in a line they would extend several hundred miles. There the early Christians, driven by persecution, met for worship, and also buried their dead. Here is a famous epitaph from the Catacombs—"Terentianus



lives."<sup>1</sup> What holy audacity! What childlike faith! Faith which one might well envy. "He that believeth in Me shall never die." Radium can shine through granite. Faith sees life beyond what we call death. Fresher than Easter lilies is the Easter Gospel—"Because I live ye shall live also." It points to the sunrise, and fills Heaven with blue and the Church with song.

ii. *Christ has the keys of Hades.* Hades means the unseen world. It depends on the context whether it is the place of happiness or woe. There is a well-known engraving of Monica and her son St. Augustine. They clasp hands in the twilight, and look wistfully into the open sky. They are not gazing at the stars, their eyes are turned towards the infinite; they are asking—Beyond the horizon, what? Who will read for us the everlasting riddle? There is a little poem by George Macdonald—

"Traveller, what lies over the hill?  
Traveller, tell to me;  
I am only a child at the window-sill,  
Over I cannot see."

A verse in Richard Baxter's hymn answers it well—

"My knowledge of that life is small,  
The eye of faith is dim;  
But 'tis enough that CHRIST knows all,  
And I shall be with Him."

It was this last thought that comforted Charles Kingsley, when the end was near, and so he said: "It is not darkness I am going to, for God is Light. It is not lonely, for Christ is with me. It is not an unknown country, for Christ is there."

"Lord, where Thou art our happy Dead must be;  
And if with Thee, what then their boundless bliss!  
Till Faith be sight, and Hope reality,  
Love's Anchorage is This."

I know there are many who have a hard struggle to find a sure footing for faith. And I am certain that sure foothold can only be found in the living CHRIST. Our Gospel is the Gospel of a Person: one Supreme Person—

<sup>1</sup> Here is another epitaph from the Catacombs: "Alexander is not dead, but lives beyond the stars."

ality dominates it all. Men hunger for living Bread, and thirst for living water. And when they turn their eyes to that Divine and radiant Figure, they find more than all they need. The essence of discipleship is loyalty to CHRIST. He is the Rock of Ages : here are no shifting sands, no tossing seas, no flickering lights, those things are far away,—here is a hiding-place from all storms, a covert from all tempests, the only place where the mind and heart and conscience of sinful man can rest in peace.

“Nothing before, nothing behind, the steps of faith  
Fall on the seeming void and find the Rock beneath.”<sup>1</sup>

“Dost thou believe on the Son of GOD?” If you read the Holy Gospels you will see how CHRIST went about asking for nothing, looking for nothing but faith, and upbraiding nothing but unbelief. As soon as He found faith, even though it were as a grain of mustard seed, He blessed it and praised it and rewarded it. “Dost thou believe on the Son of GOD?” That is the question of questions.<sup>2</sup> You may say, “I have examined all the evidence for Christ’s Resurrection I can find, and I have come to the conclusion it is one of the best attested facts in history”—all that is well. But it is quite a different thing to have a personal experience<sup>3</sup> of Christ’s power to save and bless, and to be able to say, “I am sure Christ is alive, because He has taken me out of the horrible pit and out of the miry clay of my sin

<sup>1</sup> Two soldiers “were toiling through the night, over the trackless veldt, on one of Lord Roberts’s great strategic marches. ‘What is the use of it?’ said one of the two, well-nigh worn out, stumbling on in the twilight over the rough and endless plain. ‘Never mind,’ said the other, ‘come along, Roberts knows.’ This was precisely Faith. Its foothold was firmly set on the man’s experience of his chief’s capacity and power. From that foothold it reached boldly out into the unknown; and trusted the chief’s hidden plan without a murmur.”—Bishop MOULE.

<sup>2</sup> In *Les Misérables* there is one of whom Victor Hugo says, “He was a man who took good care not to believe anything.” That is, unbelief was his deliberate choice. Unbelief of that sort closes the eyes, and hardens the heart.

<sup>3</sup> There is nothing like experience. The First Epistle of St. John begins with it—“That which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life (and the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare unto you the Life . . .).” What are St. Augustine’s *Confessions* but his own experience? Dante’s great poem is a description of the sorrows and hopes and fears of his distracted heart. Bunyan’s *Pilgrim and Grace Abounding* are histories of his own soul.



and sorrow, and has set my feet on a Rock." Understand that coming to Christ and believing in Christ are the same thing (St. John vi. 35). Just as you are—with no preparation—making no excuses—without one plea—with nothing in your hands—come to the Living Lord, and you will have "joy and peace in believing." For the LORD JESUS is the Great Teacher, the Great Consoler, the Great Example, but first and foremost He is the Great Saviour. It has been well said, "We never feel CHRIST to be a reality until we feel HIM to be a *necessity*."<sup>1</sup> If the Holy Spirit shows us the evil of our own hearts, then for the first time we realise that without Christ we are hopelessly lost. And the Gospel assures us that if we believe in Him we are triumphantly saved. "He that believeth on ME *hath* everlasting life." Let us pray as Dora Greenwell prayed—

"Be Thou to me, my Lord, my Guide,  
My Friend, yea, everything beside,  
But first, last, best, whate'er betide,  
Be Thou to me my Saviour!"

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<sup>1</sup> Austin Phelps.

## XIV

### “FOLLOW THOU ME”

“*Follow thou Me.*”—ST. JOHN xxi. 22.

THERE is a noble passage in Erasmus' Preface to his Greek Testament<sup>1</sup> where he speaks of how the Gospels contain the lineaments of Christ, and he adds : “You would see Him less if you saw Him with your very eyes.” There are thousands who are crying to-day--

“Dim tracts of time divide those golden days from me,  
Thy Voice sounds strange o'er years of change,  
How can we follow thee?”

But every believer has heard the Voice of Jesus, and that Voice is as real to him as it was to those who heard it on the hills of Galilee ; to him His Death is as real as if He died last Friday, and rose from the dead this very morning. Robert Browning depicts St. John as saying—

“To me, that story—ay, that Life and Death  
Of which I wrote ‘it was’—to me, it is ;—  
Is, here and now : I apprehend nought else.”<sup>2</sup>

There is a little book written nearly five hundred years ago of which the title is *The Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas à Kempis. With the exception of the Bible it has probably had a larger circulation than any book in the world. In this respect our old friend *The Pilgrim's*

<sup>1</sup> Westcott and Hort transferred it to the title-page of their Greek Testament. The passage is :—

“Other writings are of such a character as to make many regret deeply the trouble that they have spent upon them. . . . But happy is he whom death finds meditating upon these. May we all thirst for them with all our hearts, embrace them, dwell constantly in them, cherish them, and lay down our lives upon them. May we be transformed into them, as study passes into character. . . . These writings represent the living Image of that sacred Mind, and set before you Christ Himself speaking, healing, dying, rising again, in such complete reality, that you would not so truly see Him if you were to behold him with your eyes.”

<sup>2</sup> “A Death in the Desert.”

*Progress* has to take the second place. The author lived seventy-one years in a monastery. There seem to be several reasons why this book has cast its spell over so many lives. First, it urges the imitation of the Character of a living Person.<sup>1</sup> Then, it shows that the human soul may have direct, personal, constant communion with the Saviour Himself, that we can speak with Him—nothing and no one between—as a man speaketh with his friend. And a third reason is because it contains so much of the Bible. "At that time the Bible was a fountain of inspired truth, everywhere sealed up: but a whisper ran through the western nations of Europe, that the work of Thomas à Kempis contained some slender rivulets of truth, silently stealing away into light from that interdicted fountain."<sup>2</sup> It was this that first popularised the book of the Scripture-loving monk. And there was another reason, the little book speaks to the heart: when a Christian reads *The Imitation* he says, "This man knows me." But you should always remember that the first and deepest word of the Gospel of Christ is not imitation but trust: and we miss from this good book the note of triumph which rings through the teaching of St. Paul and St. John.

Sir Frederick Leighton in closing his brilliant address to art-students said: "And now I leave with you for your example and inspiration the incomparable Michael Angelo." And I leave with you for your trust and imitation the incomparable CHRIST, Son of God, Son of Man, the Light of the world, our only Hope. Make the same resolution as that made by the late Bishop of Oxford, William Stubbs—

"Faint-hearted, fearful, doubtful if I be,  
Gladly or sadly I will follow Thee."

Those words may exactly describe some of you in this Church—you may sometimes feel "faint-hearted,"

<sup>1</sup> There is a picture by an Italian artist of the Middle Ages, in which an angel is seated outside the gate of Heaven with a Likeness of Christ in his hand. As pilgrim after pilgrim reaches the entrance, the angel asks, "Are you like Christ?" If there is a faithful, though ever so feeble a resemblance to the Picture, the gate is opened and the man admitted.

<sup>2</sup> De Quincey.

or "fearful," or "doubtful"—about oh! how many things—or "glad," or "sad"; never mind, you have but one thing to do, so do it now, do it always, "Follow thou ME." This was the personal method of Jesus Christ. He did not ask, Do you hold certain doctrines? He said—"Come unto ME": "Believe in ME": "Abide in ME": "Follow thou ME." This is more than personal religion: it is personal trust in a Personal Saviour. When we come to Him, our feet will move in a large room and in a wealthy place. For He is the Source of all life and power and peace. "Follow thou ME." Put that "thou" and that "ME" together, to your great and endless comfort.

## XV

# THE HEART AND THE TREASURE

### THOUGHTS FOR ASCENSION DAY

*For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*—ST. MATTHEW VI. 21.

GEORGE MACDONALD has a sermon on this text, and he points out the reason why we should not lay up treasures on earth is, not because the moth and rust might corrupt, and the thief steal them, but because "that which is with the treasure must fare as the treasure." The point is, not the treasure, but the place where the treasure is kept. And certainly, if the treasure is destroyed, the heart will be destroyed too. If the treasure is in Heaven, the heart will be in Heaven also, even where our Saviour Christ is gone before.

"Why dost thou here gaze about, since this is not the place of thy rest? In Heaven ought to be thy home, and all earthly things are to be looked on as they forward thy journey thither. All things pass away, and thou together with them. Beware thou cleave not unto them, lest thou be entangled and perish. Let thy thoughts be on the Highest, and thy prayers for mercy directed unto Christ without ceasing."<sup>1</sup>

"To the eye of faith home is always near; in one form or another it is the great object of life; it is the pivot around which our life revolves from the cradle to the grave. 'I must hurry home,' says the mother, whose heart is with her baby in the cradle. 'I wish I were at home,' says the schoolboy, as he bends over his hopeless task. 'If I could only see home,' exclaims the sailor as he strains his eyes from the masthead that rocks on the ocean waves. 'Now, for home,' says the

<sup>1</sup> *The Imitation.*

workman, as he drops his tools and puts on his coat. 'I'm off home,' says the clerk, as he leaves the office and hastens to catch the train. 'I shall soon be home,' says the Christian wayfarer, as life's long day draws to a close, and he looks out towards eternity."<sup>1</sup>

"Lift *up* your hearts." Christ is reported to have said:—"The world is merely a bridge, you are to pass over it and not build upon it."<sup>2</sup>

"If," said M'Cheyne, "I could hear Jesus pleading for me in the next room, I should not fear a host of enemies; but distance makes no difference; He is pleading for me." "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." If we realised the full meaning of the Ascension, it would bring a new star in our horizon, and a new power in our life. The eye of faith would always see the waving of the Hands that bless.

"See where before the Throne He stands,  
And pours the all-prevailing prayer!  
Points to His Side, and lifts His Hands,  
And shows that I am graven there!"

With right good cheer the Bedford tinker sang his prison rhyme—

"Though men may keep my outward man  
Within their locks and bars,  
Yet, by the faith of Christ, I can  
Mount higher than the stars!"

In Cicero's famous dream of Scipio, the hero, in passing to the starry skies, is asked by his guide: "How long will you keep your eyes fixed downwards?" A great Scottish artist, Sir Joseph Noel Paton, has interpreted one of the portraits in the Bunyan album—the man with eager, wolfish eyes,<sup>3</sup> raking amid straws and baubles and not seeing the sorrowing angel with the starry crown. The downward look is followed by the downward life: the upward look by the upward life. "Lift up your hearts."

<sup>1</sup> Canon Duncan.

<sup>2</sup> The words were found by Dr. Dore on the gateway of a Mosque in Sikri.

<sup>3</sup> "Look at a file of your sister's letters," says Thackeray, "how you clung to each other till you quarrelled about the twenty-pound legacy!"



It was a strange parting. "If the Story had been mythical or imaginative, all the songs would have been for the Ascension, all the silence for the Christmas; because it is divine, the song is at Christmas, the silence at the Ascension."<sup>1</sup> Certainly, none but an inspired writer could write so simply of such an event as the Ascension.

It was a parting with "great joy," and so it has no parallel in the long sad story of human partings. A poet has described a parting scene between a mother and a boy who is leaving home for the first time to face the temptations of some great city. She could hardly speak, but falteringly uttered the words—"My boy, you know what's in my heart."<sup>2</sup>—When the disciples saw the Pierced Hands they knew what was in His Heart—the Heart that had broken for love of them. They were losing His Bodily Presence, they were gaining His Spiritual Presence, and He would come again. "Lift *up* your hearts." "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

"One sweet Face, and one great fact—the Face of the Christ, the fact of the Cross—should fill the past. One sweet Face, one great fact—the Face of the Christ, the fact of His Presence with us all the days—should fill the present. One regal Face, one great hope, should fill the future; the face of the King that sitteth upon the throne, the hope that He will come again, and 'so we shall be ever with the Lord.'"<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Archbishop Alexander.

<sup>2</sup> "Not a word of the devil, his plans and his wiles,  
His lies and his love of deceiving;  
Not a word of the world with its follies and smiles,  
She said when her son she was leaving.  
I know on my journey she wished me all bliss,  
I know that for me she is praying,  
But all that I heard her lips utter was this:  
'You know what my heart, dear, is saying.'"

<sup>3</sup> Dr. MacLaren.

## XVI

### A MISSIONARY FORECAST

*And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.*—ST. MATTHEW viii. 11.

HERE is a missionary forecast. The missionary element in Christianity may slumber but it never dies. The Bible is a missionary Book : it contains a message from GOD, and it lays on every one who receives that message the obligation to communicate it to others. The Cross is a missionary Cross, and just as east and west joined in the Crucifixion, so many from the east and west shall meet at that Cross in repentance and faith, and at last be gathered into the kingdom of Heaven. For Christianity has always been a missionary Faith, as Gibbon the great historian of Rome wrote of the early disciples —“It became the most sacred duty of a new convert to diffuse among his friends the inestimable blessings which he had received.” At first it spread like a forest fire. Each tree kindled set fire to another. The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church. The golden secret was whispered from one man to his neighbour. And indeed the Church of Christ is missionary or it is nothing. Professor Seeley says in *Ecce Homo* : “When the power of reclaiming the lost dies out of a Church it ceases to be a Church.” Missionary work is not an option, it is an obligation ; it is not a luxury, it is a duty.

Westcott was once preaching a Missionary Sermon at Cambridge, and he spoke on three points.

1. The Little done in the past for Foreign Missions.
2. The Much done by GOD through our little.
3. The Much more we must do in the future.

After each head he allowed fully five minutes for

prayer, and these spaces of silent prayer—says Dr. Stalker, who heard the Sermon—have kept these three aspects of this great subject alive in my mind ever since.

St. Paul said God had given His Son "a Name which is above every name" (Phil. ii. 9). St. Paul was not only the greatest of the Apostles, but the most far-seeing to say so when believers were but few and the world was ringing with other names.—He believed in the conquering Christ: that the Christian creed would triumph at last, and Christ's Kingdom would have no end.

"No men want help," said Dr. Owen, "like the men that want the Gospel." Take any young man born in a heathen land, where there is no light but Buddha's. Like ourselves, that young man has to face two facts, sin and sorrow. First, sin. Let us suppose he goes to a good Buddhist priest. The priest may remind him that the great dreamer said, "Sin is a bad throw." And he may quote another of Buddha's sayings, "You can wipe out your sins by good deeds." The well-meaning priest may give the young man rules to help him to live a good life, but, he would add, you must save yourself. Or suppose that same young man were to seek consolation from his priest for some heartrending sorrow, I can imagine the answer would be, "My son, sorrow is everywhere: there is not a house where there is not one dead, the air is full of farewells to the dying, everywhere there are streaming eyes and wringing hands; but look at that image of the pitiful Buddha, (for pity is the keynote of Buddhism), he saw and felt the sorrow of the world, and though a prince became a homeless wanderer, if so be he might in some sort heal its bleeding sores; look at that image, he felt for such griefs as yours." The truth is, *where there is no light but Buddha's, there is no Saviour proclaimed, Who can save His people from their sins and sorrows.*

I confess that, like Bishop Wilberforce, we have a difficulty. In the year 1866 he and Carlyle were walking together, and talking of John Sterling, a man greatly loved by both. "Bishop," said Carlyle, "have you really got a creed?" "Yes," was the answer, "and it grows firmer under my feet every year. But I have a

difficulty." "What is that?" said the sage. "It does not make the progress I wish in the world." After a pause, Carlyle said with some feeling, "If you have a creed, you can afford to wait."

Two great Words of Christ were "come" and "go." We have often dwelt on the first, to our great and endless comfort. "Come" is primarily addressed to the unbelieving. "Go" to the believing. "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation." "Go"—for Christ's Sake, and the Gospel's, for the sake of the heathen, and for your own sake.

Let me quote a brief passage from a sermon by Dr. Maclaren: "If I could isolate here . . . one heathen soul and let you see what it really is in its gloom, in its want of support for even the most elementary principles of morality, in its all-encircling terrors, in its terrible sense of being helplessly in the grip of an inscrutable Power, in the dark hopelessness of its death, I do not think you would want much more to set you aflame with new zeal for this great enterprise. And if you took that one soul and multiplied by all the tremendous array of figures that would be needed to number the population of the earth, oh, brethren, it does seem strange that men, who ought to have learnt pity at the Feet of the Incarnate Compassion, should turn a deaf ear and a blind eye and a careless heart to the condition of these their brethren."

Over the dust and din of earth, over its blood and tears, I hear a Voice like the sound of mighty waters: "Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven." What triumphal music the heart can hear in these immortal Words. Christ cannot be disappointed. He will call His Own from over land and sea, and when they hear His Voice they will answer, and the tale of His loved ones shall be complete. "He shall see of the travail of His Soul, and shall be satisfied" (Isaiah liii. 11).

Read this estimate of Livingstone, from the lately published autobiography of Henry Morton Stanley:—

"He preached no sermon by word of mouth while I was in company with him, but each day of my com-

panionship with him witnessed a sermon acted. Lowly of spirit, meek in speech, merciful of heart, pure in mind, peaceful in act. Suspected by the Arabs to be an informer and therefore calumniated . . . yet bearing no ill-will. Cursed by marauders yet physicking their infirmities, most despitefully used yet praying daily for all manner and condition of men. Had my soul been of brass and my heart of spelter, the powers of my head had surely compelled me to recognise with due honour the spirit of Goodness which manifested itself in him. Had there been anything of the Pharisee or the hypocrite in him, had I traced any meanness or guile in him, I had surely turned away a sceptic. But my every study of him during health and sickness deepened my reverence. His life was an evidence that he served God with all his heart."



## XVII

### AT THE GATE BEAUTIFUL

*Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none ; but such as I have give I thee : In the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.*—ACTS iii. 6.

ST. PETER and St. John went up together to the Temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer, that is to say three o'clock in the afternoon. It was the hour of Christ's Death on the Cross, the time of the evening sacrifice. Special periods for prayer, and special places for prayer, are desirable and helpful. Indeed one may go further and say that regular times for prayer, and Bible study, are as necessary for the welfare of the soul, as regular meals are for the health of the body. Here is an illustration from the life of one of the busiest of men, General Gordon, whose statue is in Trafalgar Square, close by Nelson's. When he was in camp, every morning soon after dawn, after the chief orders of the day had been issued, there was a pause. Outside the door of his tent hung a handkerchief ; and while that fluttered there, every one knew that the General must not be disturbed. He was talking with GOD.

We get more than we seek when we come to the Gate Beautiful. We get an opportunity for service. The hour of opportunity lies close by the hour of prayer. There is the heavenly vision, there is the daily duty.

They laid the lame man at the Gate Beautiful. You cannot divorce alms from the temple. It was believed that the people who went there would help.

i. *First of all, there was Divine power.* A notable miracle had been performed. By the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, a well-known lame beggar was suddenly healed. And there were many witnesses. Some new power had most certainly been exercised. Those in authority send for the irregular preachers,

and ask the fatal question, "By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?" (Acts iv. 7). By that subtle question they tried to make the Apostles condemn themselves. If they confessed to having used any other Name than JEHOVAH, by an old Mosiac Statute the penalty would be death by stoning. But they did not flinch. Their answer was ready—"In the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Whom ye crucified, Whom GOD raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole" (verse 10). A supernatural work had been done. And for that work a supernatural power had been exercised. And that power was Christ's.

ii. *Next, there was human sympathy.* He was carried to the Gate Beautiful. They could not heal him, but they did what they could. And St. Peter too, "took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately" [here St. Luke, who was a doctor, uses the technical language of a physician] "his feet" (that is the soles of his feet) "and ankle bones received strength." Let me give you two simple illustrations of the force of human sympathy. Sister Dora was a most beautiful and accomplished lady. She devoted herself to nursing in a Small-pox Hospital. All the wards communicated with her bedroom. At any hour of the night, the bell at the head of her bed might ring, and however worn and tired she would rise, saying, "The Master is come and calleth for thee," and hasten to the patient who had need of her. The other illustration is from one of the finest biographies in the English language, Boswell's life of Johnson. It was midnight in London, and Samuel Johnson hobbled along to Bolt Court, with the half-dead street-walker on his back, and laid her down on old Mrs. Williams' bed to nurse her back to life. No one consults Johnson's Dictionary now, and few people read his *Lives of the Poets*, but that act is worthy of everlasting remembrance. "I prayed to GOD," says George Fox, "that He would baptize my heart into the sense of all conditions, so that I might be able to enter into the needs and conditions of all."

iii. *The healed man is a proof of the truth of the Gospel.* "They could say nothing against it." He is a living evidence of Christianity. The wonder-working Name

has lost none of its power. At the Gate Beautiful, still "Jesus of Nazareth passeth by." Where two or three are gathered together in His Name, He is present, and His presence brings the blessing.

Matthew Arnold well said: "The bringer of light and happiness, the calmer and pacifier, or invigorator and stimulator, is one of the chiefest of doctors. Such a doctor is Jesus."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Literature and Dogma*, pp. 135-6.

## XVIII

### HOLIDAYS

*And He said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat.*—ST. MARK VI. 31.

WHEN I was a boy in Birmingham, among the various popular preachers there was one in particular who would talk to his congregation about scales and measures, about tea and sugar, about adulterated mustard, about butter half of which was fat, about stocktaking and long credit, about dressing shop windows, dress and jewellery, about dinners and evening parties. He was convinced that religion was concerned not with a bit of man's life, but with the whole. There are seven days in the week and not only one, and his sermons were not for Sunday alone but for week-days as well. They were for the office and the shop, the nursery and the schoolroom, the drawing-room and the kitchen. I think this is all to the good, always provided the preacher puts in the forefront of his teaching the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I am going to speak to you about holidays. It is well to live a strenuous life: that is living and working up to the measure of our strength; but many live a strained life which is living beyond the measure of our strength. All workers need rest. We are sure to become jaded and weary-hearted if we do not rest enough. We need rest by night, Sunday rest, and the rest of holidays. We want an absolute change of scene, and if it is impossible to get that, the next best thing is a change of employment. Every one ought to have some hobby, quite distinct from the daily work. The pursuit of fresh knowledge is always refreshing, and to endeavour by honest study to improve our minds is

a duty. But, beyond this, we need holidays. There is a story which comes down from early Christian times, of a young hunter at Ephesus returning from the chase with an unstrung bow in his hand. He entered the house of St. John and found him playing with a tame dove. The young man was astonished to see an Apostle so lightly employed, but St. John asked why he carried the bow unstrung in his hand. He answered, in order that it might retain its elasticity. Just so, said St. John, mind and body will not retain their elasticity or usefulness unless they are at times unstrung, prolonged tension destroys their power. To change the illustration, in the fisherman's craft it is sometimes necessary to cease fishing and repair the nets. Mending is as necessary as fishing. Time spent in mending is never wasted. It is said that Rubens, the great painter, amused himself with playing at being an ambassador. I will give you four rules for a successful holiday.

i. *It must be preceded by work.* So it certainly was in the case of Christ and His disciples, and it was followed by hard work too. And they found in the desert place the rest that brought refreshment, recreation, refection.

ii. *You must not have too much of it.* Remember Wordsworth's lines—

“Me this unchartered freedom tires,  
I feel the weight of chance desires.”

So it is desirable to have an aim in your holiday. As Cowper reminds us—

“Absence of occupation is not rest ;  
A mind quite vacant is a mind distressed.”

iii. *Try to make others happy.* That is an unfailing rule as to how to get happiness for yourself. When we freshen the lives of others, we freshen our own.

iv. *But before everything else seek to spend your holiday with Christ.* As Samuel Rutherford said, “Oh for a long holiday with Christ, and one long lasting season of rest!” Wherever you go, be loyal to Christ: do not live the life of summer atheism, even for a few weeks. Do not leave behind you the blessed Sabbath, or your



religious duties. Yes, spend your holiday with Christ. He does not say, "Go," but "Come." Let us say, "LORD, Come," to Him. His Presence insures a happy holiday. In our days of toil or hours of sorrow, we cannot do without Him. And in holiday times we need Him just as much. In a holiday with Christ there is anticipation, and fruition, and retrospect, and all of it pleasure.

"Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while." For He loved the works of His Father: the blue waves of the sea of Galilee, the lilies of the field, the forests of Lebanon where the scent of the cedar-trees perfumed the air round about, the beauty of the sky and clouds, the glories of the eastern sunrise and sunset.— If our holidays are thus spent with Christ, they will remind us of the rest at last with our Saviour in His Presence where there is fulness of joy. You have heard of Henry Ward Beecher, the great American preacher, one of the bravest and tenderest of men, who earned the grateful remembrance of all mankind on account of his advocacy of temperance and the abolition of slavery.<sup>1</sup> It was the evening of the last Sunday of his life at Plymouth Church (February 27, 1887). The service was over, the crowd had gone away, but the great preacher lingered in the church where he had preached for forty years. The organ pealed in the loft, and the choir sang softly the hymn he wished—

"I heard the Voice of Jesus say,  
Come, weary one, and rest."

Two boys from the street wandered in, and listened in silence with upturned faces; tears came into the old man's eyes, and coming down the pulpit stair, he lifted up each of the children, and kissed them as a mother might, and then with a child on either hand, they left the church together that winter's night—the children to take their way in this world, he to the Paradise of God.

"I heard the Voice of Jesus say,  
Come, weary one, and rest."

<sup>1</sup> In the great contest against slavery in the United States, he did work as noble as that done by his illustrious sister, Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe.

## XIX

### A PRAYER THAT ALWAYS PREVAILS

*And he said, I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me.*—GENESIS xxxii. 26.

LONG years before Jacob had seen the heavenly vision in his loneliness at Bethel. Then he was a fugitive, for he had left home behind, and was faring forth in his independent life. There comes the dream of the ladder, and a new sense of a Divine Presence awakes in him. At nightfall his pillow was a stone, and his bedchamber a rocky glen. In the morning the rocky glen becomes the House of God. The ladder imprinted on Jacob's mind the certainty of communication between earth and heaven, for "behold, the LORD stood above it," and spoke most comfortable Words—of blessing beyond all human thought which through him and his seed should reach the world, and then followed the Promise of a Presence, "I am with thee," and of keeping, "I will keep thee," and of guidance, "and will bring thee again into this land," and of never forsaking, "I will not leave thee." The best of it was, the dream was all coming true. When God took Jacob in hand he was a very faulty character. He was mean and over-reaching, wily and crafty, but by chastisements and heavenly visions he was corrected, and became at last an Israel, a Prince with GOD. If God begins a good work in a human soul, He completes the gracious work He began. The Name which Helen in *All's Well that Ends Well* used for GOD is—"He that of greatest works is Finisher." GOD always finishes things. It is man who leaves them incomplete. You will see how wonderfully God's grace stole down into Jacob's heart when you notice how he never attributed his success to his own cleverness or skill. I always admire him for that. He remembered the time when he was a poor, lonely, friendless boy, and ever since then he had seen the goodness of the LORD

in the land of the living, and GOD fed him all his life, and the Angel redeemed him from all evil, and the gentleness of God made him great,—his only wonder was he had been so sinful and GOD had been so kind. It was exactly the feeling that St. Augustine had, as any one may see who reads his *Confessions*. When he came to reflect on the strange circumstances of his life, on his sinful boyhood and sensual youth, St. Augustine was sure there had been some unseen Power directing, guiding, controlling, shaping his life. God, who is Love, had been calling him, and drawing him, and teaching him, and at last his wilful heart responded, for it had been conquered by irresistible Love.

But many and many a changeful year had passed since that night at Bethel. They had been years of laughter and tears, of cloud and sunshine, of sorrow and joy, for GOD tempered these things together for Jacob as He does for us. He was returning from Mesopotamia, on the eve of meeting Esau, and he encounters some mysterious Stranger on the mountain side. Through the long watches of the night he was locked in a struggle for life or death.

i. *Jacob teaches us to pray.* The story of Jacob's wrestling is an old-world story, but it is repeated to-day in many and many a life. On some dreary night of sorrow or doubt or disappointment everything appears to slip away from us: the dearest possession we have, our faith, seems to melt into thin air: our very reason totters, but worse than all, GOD seems to be against us. If we could see the end from the beginning, we should know that these heartrending sorrows are blessings in disguise, and leave us infinitely richer than we ever could have been without them. But the moment of our direst need is the time to pray the prayer that always prevails—"I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me." "True prayers never come weeping home," said Leighton.

"Say, what is Prayer, when it is Prayer indeed?

The mighty utterance of a mighty need;

The man is praying, who doth press with might,

Out of his darkness into God's own light."

—ARCHBISHOP TRENCH.

And in this regard who can help remembering  
Charles Wesley's hymn—

“Come, O Thou Traveller unknown,  
Whom still I hold, but cannot see ;  
My company before is gone,  
And I am left alone with Thee :  
With Thee all night I mean to stay,  
And wrestle till the break of day.”

ii. *Jacob teaches us to trust.*<sup>1</sup> He trusts when all his strength is gone, when he is helpless and lame, and ready to fall. Here is a sacred paradox : he is most powerful when he is powerless, when he is weak, then he is strong. In the fifteenth chapter of St. Matthew there is the story of a woman whose persevering faith prevailed over the Son of God (xv. 22-29). She was not Jacob's child after the flesh, for she was a woman of Canaan, but she was Jacob's child after the Spirit, for the same Spirit moved in her, and like Jacob she teaches us not to be afraid to trust.

“Let not thy heart despond and say,  
How shall I bear the trying day?  
He has engaged by firm decree,  
That ‘As thy days thy strength shall be.’”

iii. *Jacob teaches us to hope.* To hope for ourselves and for others. Is there anything in Heaven or earth that can change the character of this crafty bargain-making man? “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?” Yes, the Grace of God can

<sup>1</sup> A poor but worthy inhabitant of Paris once went to the Bishop with a heart almost overwhelmed. “Father,” said he, with the most profound humility, “I am a sinner, I feel that I am a sinner ; but it is against my will. Every hour I ask for light and humbly pray for faith, but still I am overwhelmed with doubts. Surely if I were not despised of GOD He would not leave me to struggle thus with the adversary of souls.” The Bishop thus consoled the sorrowing penitent : “The King of France has two castles in different situations and sends a commander to each of them. The Castle of Montleberry stands at a place remote from danger far inland, but the Castle of La Rochelle is on the coast, where it is liable to continual sieges. Now which of the two commanders, think you, stands the highest in the estimation of the King—the commander of Montleberry or he of La Rochelle?” “Doubtless,” said the poor man, “the King values him most who has the hardest task and braves the greatest dangers.” “Thou art right,” replied the Bishop, “and now apply this matter to thy case and to mine ; for my heart is like the Castle of Montleberry and thine like that of La Rochelle.”—JAMES S. DRUMMOND.

do what is otherwise impossible. Jacob the supplanter can be transformed into Israel, a prince with God. "The eternal God lit up the crimson blaze of the meteor morning along the Syrian hills for the coronation of a Prince."<sup>1</sup> And when the dawn rises over the hills of Gilead he said, "I have seen GOD face to face." And he called the name of the place Peniel, the Face of GOD.

<sup>1</sup> Archbishop Alexander.



## THE HARVEST FESTIVAL

THE Harvest Festival is one of the oldest of Festivals. It dates back from the childhood of the world. It is a Festival of joy and gladness. Whether it is kept on the vast plains of India or Russia, the levels of China, or the virgin soil of Canada, in the old world, or in the new, harvest joy is the same. There is the joy of realised hopes: the joy of fellowship, for work is more successful when men combine: and the joy of service, because the gathered corn is to feed the hungry world. "Blessed are ye that mourn, for ye shall laugh"—it is clear from those Words that laughter will be heard in Heaven. So I agree with George Macdonald when he said, "GOD invented laughter, and gave it to His children." And I admire the Scotch version of a verse in the Hundreth Psalm, "Him serve with *mirth*, His Praise forth tell." "We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life." I want to be a helper of your joy, and I have chosen a text full of gladness, which you will find in Psalm cxlv. 10: "All Thy works shall praise Thee, O LORD; and thy saints shall bless Thee."

The Bible is the richest story-book and picture-book in the world. Some of these pictures, if once seen, can never be forgotten. For example, Christ blessing little children, or the world's most glorious picture, Christ on the Cross. Who could ever forget these? Or Judas betraying Christ in the garden. Then in the Old Testament, Job in sackcloth, amid the ruins of his desolated home. Or David by the gate in an agony of suspense waiting for news of the battle. The two armies, the King's army and Absalom's army, are fighting for empire. Hear the cries of anguish which David utters, and you will never forget them—"O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" But I think one of the prettiest stories in the Old Testament

is where David the Shepherd-boy is sent for in order to soothe the fretful, gloomy, revengeful, demon-tormented King. You will find it in the sixteenth chapter of the First Book of Samuel. But indeed David has been playing on his harp, and singing the sweet and holy songs of Zion all down the ages. Listen and you will hear him singing—"All Thy works shall praise Thee, O LORD; and Thy saints shall bless Thee."

Our English poets, too, revel in the beauties of nature. "God made the country, and man made the town," said William Cowper, the dear old poet who was one of the first to describe rural England as it is. Wordsworth tells how the inspiration of nature enters a maiden's heart and stamps its sweet mark on her very face—

"She shall lean her ear  
In many a secret place,  
Where rivulets dance their wayward round,  
And beauty born of murmuring sound  
Shall pass into her face."

And you will remember Keble's well-known lines—

"Thou Who hast given me eyes to see  
And love this sight so fair,  
Give me a heart to find out Thee,  
And read Thee everywhere."

But, of course, far and away the finest descriptions of nature are found in the Bible.<sup>1</sup> The Bible is the best Book of the seasons. Read Psalm civ., the Psalm of Creation. The Hebrew Psalmists will teach you how "The Heavens are telling the Glory of GOD, and the firmament showeth His Handiwork." They will teach you how GOD makes the corn to grow, and the grapes to drink the sunlight on the hillsides of the world, that God crowns the year with His goodness, and will crown the everlasting years with everlasting goodness. Or take the description of spring in Palestine in Solomon's Song, chapter two, and eleventh and following verses—"For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in

<sup>1</sup> Cf. "As the flower of roses in the spring of the year, as lilies by the rivers of waters, and as the branches of the frankincense tree in the time of summer" (Ecclesiasticus i. 8).

our land; the fig-tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell." Isaiah was not only the Evangelical Prophet of the Sufferings and Glory of Christ, but he was the poet of the fields and gardens. "Lo, these are but the outskirts of His Ways: and how small a whisper do we hear of Him"! (Job xxvi. 14, R.V.). With those sublime words Job closed a magnificent description of the greatness of GOD in the natural world.

But above every one else, Christ the Eternal Teacher stands and teaches in the harvest-field, for from that field He found the texts of immortal Sermons. He heard all the voices of nature, He preached on winter and springtime, the golden summer and the fruitful autumn. He loved the birds and flowers, He considered the lilies shedding their perfume at His Feet, and saw in them a glory that outshone the brilliance of Solomon. In all things beautiful He beheld the goodness of His Father—"My Father worketh hitherto, and I work," He said (St. John v. 17). "All Thy works shall praise Thee, O Lord."

"What shall I render unto the LORD for all His benefits towards me?" "How much owest thou?" A minister was reading a subscription list. Of course it started, as subscription lists usually do, with large sums. Mr. So-and-So, £500—tremendous applause. Mr. Somebody Else, £250—great applause. The applause seemed proportioned to the amount given; it grew less as the amounts grew less. Until at last, the name of a poor seamstress was read out, at the very bottom of the list, as having given five shillings. No one applauded that. It wasn't worth a clap. And the minister who was reading the list, and who knew what five shillings meant to the poor woman, looked up from his paper amid the silence, and said, "Hush, I hear the clapping of the Pierced Hands."

"And Thy saints shall bless Thee." As one of the old mystics said, "A line of praise is worth a leaf of prayer."<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew Psalmist looked forward to

<sup>1</sup> "Who is the greatest saint in the world? Not he who prays and fasts most, nor he who gives the most; but he who is always thankful to God, who wills everything that God wills, receives everything as an instance of God's goodness, and has a heart always ready to praise God for it."—WILLIAM LAW.

praising GOD "*for ever and ever*" (verse 1). If so, he certainly must have believed that there was a world beyond the gates of time. And how much cause have we to bless GOD. "He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities."

Then think of the blessings there are in Christ. When he fed the multitude He gave them rest as well as food. "Make the men sit down," He said, and then He proceeded to feed them. And how quickly—

"Twas springtime when He blessed the bread,  
And Harvest when He brake."

Lo, the desert is transformed into a banquet-hall. And Christ is here now to give us rest and food. His Gospel meets man's highest instincts, and satisfies his deepest needs, as surely as the key in yonder door fits the lock. Then there is this—many an "open door" of service for Christ. Browning says—

"How good is man's life, the mere living  
How fit to employ  
All the heart, and the soul, and the senses for ever in joy!"<sup>1</sup>

That is certainly true of the lowliest life if it is spent for Christ.

In the eighteenth century there was a famous preacher, George Whitefield. He was a great orator, and moreover a great actor, so much so, had he gone on the stage he would have amassed a vast fortune. Sometimes an actor would go to hear him. On this occasion the actor sat in the gallery. Whitefield turned to him and said, "And thou, poor Ramble," (that was his name in the play) "who hast so often rambled from Him, O cease thy ramblings, and come to Jesus!" So I say now to you: Old men and maidens, young men and little children, come to Jesus!—And

"When, in a world of light and love,  
We keep the harvest-home above,  
Let none, O Lord, be missing there  
Of all who now are gathered here."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I suppose one reason why people read Browning is that he was a radiant optimist. Certainly his faith in God was unshakable. In parts he is hard to understand. It has been said that to study Browning is like studying Bradshaw in a London fog. Still, he was one of the poets of faith who doubted men's doubts away.

<sup>2</sup> Canon Fleming.

## XXI

### THE FRIENDSHIP OF CHRIST

*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*—ST. JOHN xv. 13.

CHRIST appeals to the intellect. He asks, "What think ye of Christ?" He also appeals to the imagination, for all that is most sacred in art and poetry clusters around Him. He appeals to the conscience, for He gives a new code of morals, revising the Law of Moses, and inspiring new thoughts of mercy and pity. Above all, Christ makes his appeal to the heart. He calls his disciples friends, and will lay down His life on their behalf. Names denoting the sweetest and tenderest affection known to man Christ claims as His Own and signs with the sign of the Cross—mother, brother, sister, friend, for indeed He can be mother, brother, sister, friend, all in one. "I have called you friends." The blessings of human friendship are very great. Who would not desire one true friend to be near when the light is low? Who would not wish those we loved on earth to welcome us home at last? The Old Testament has many a sweet picture of the friendship of GOD and man. "And the LORD spake with Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend" (Ex. xxxiii. 11). That is one of the gems of the Old Testament. Moreover, Abraham is called the Friend of GOD. "But thou, Israel, art My Servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham My friend" (Is. xli. 8 : St. James ii. 23). In the New Testament the Man of Sorrows had His friends.<sup>1</sup> St. John the Baptist was the friend of the

<sup>1</sup> South has a sermon on the friendship of our Lord with His people: in His friendship they have (a) freedom of access, (b) favourable construction, (c) sympathy in sorrow, (d) communication of thought, (e) counsel in difficulty, (f) constancy and perpetuity.

"If He had never died for His enemies," says one of the old fathers, "He would never have possessed his friends."



Bridegroom, Lazarus and Martha and Mary and many others were His friends.

*He is a human Friend*, for He had "Hands that love could kiss and nails could wound."

*He is a Divine Friend*, for He is the Son of God. Did you ever hear the startling phrase coined by Thomas à Kempis—"familiar friendship with Jesus." That old author says—"Love Him, and keep Him for thy Friend, Who, when all go away, will not forsake thee, nor suffer thee to perish at the last."

With regard to our friends on earth, we delight to speak *to* them. "Keep your friendships in repair," said Dr. Johnson. And we delight to speak *of* them. We may apply both those thoughts to the heavenly Friend.

I have read a story of a traveller who shared the simple meal of a monastery in Italy. He was placed at a long table and sat next the oldest monk, and directly opposite to a faded picture of the Last Supper. He looked for a little time at the Figure of Christ, and the faces of the Apostles, and thought of his neighbour who had for so many years the picture before him, and then turned to him and said, "Have you never all these years got tired of seeing day after day the almost obliterated picture over there?" The old man smiled, and then in a quiet, awe-stricken voice said, "My son, I have lived so long with that picture, I have companied so long with our blessed Lord and His Apostles, that these men"—and here he pointed to his fellow-monks—"that these men are the shadows." That man knew what "familiar friendship with Jesus" was.

There were teachers in our Lord's time who tried to reform men, and insisted on many a rule for holy living, but little progress seemed to be made. Christ saw that the heart of man wanted a new spring. He knew that the new spring would kindle new enthusiasms, and create new lives. The new spring was love. Let me refer you to the words of St. Paul whose life was to be the wonder and inspiration of ages to come. He said, "The love of Christ constraineth us." The Greek word means the force with which a current of a mighty stream is driven into a narrow channel, the waters rolling on deep, solemn, silent, but with irresistible force. I some-

times think the love of Christ is to some extent a lost passion. Take the lines of Bishop Ken—

“Bear me, dear Lord ! where’er Thou art—  
O never then from me depart ;  
For to my soul ’tis hell to be  
But for one moment without Thee.”

“O Calvary, Calvary,” (Robert Morrison the missionary wrote when starting his work in China), “when I view the Blood of Jesus streaming down thy sides, I am amazed at my coldness of affection towards the LORD . . .” Or Charles Wesley’s hymn—“O Love Divine, how sweet Thou art.” Or William Cowper’s “Hark ! my soul, it is the LORD.” Or Isaac Watts’ “Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove.” I am ashamed when I read these burning lines, and can only pray in the words of St. Anselm—

“O most loving Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom floweth all love ; let our hearts, frozen in sin, cold to Thee, and cold to others, be warmed by this divine fire.”—In *Great Souls at Prayer*.

## THE SABBATH BY THE RIVER

*And on the Sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women who resorted thither.—ACTS xvi. 13.*

THE opening words of the Acts of the Apostles remind us that St. Luke was the writer of one of the Gospels. Both were dedicated to Theophilus, who was doubtless a person of considerable influence. The Book of the Acts is a continuation of the Life of Christ. It begins where the Gospel ends, and concludes abruptly,<sup>1</sup> as if in order that, chapter by chapter, it might be continued "Till He come." For indeed, the sequel has been in writing all down the ages. It is a delightful Book; a Book written by St. Luke is sure to be delightful, but this is more vivid, more fascinating, more interesting than any traveller's journal, and without one querulous line. We owe a great debt to St. Luke. But for him how little we should have known of early Church history. It is he who tells us of the great Day of Pentecost, of the Conversion and Life of St. Paul, and of the admission of the first Gentile convert into the Christian Church. There is something, however, if you would really understand this Book, that you must especially remember—Christ the Lord is behind these changing scenes, guiding all, directing all, controlling all.<sup>2</sup> He completes the number of the Apostles (i. 24):

<sup>1</sup> St. Luke wrote at the time in which his narrative breaks off—before the date of the Pastoral Epistles.

<sup>2</sup> At the river Zambesi. Livingstone was met by hostile tribes. His first impulse was to steal away in the night. Then he remembered the Lord's words, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." On that Promise he rested and steadied his fluttering heart. The following day, he and his little party crossed, himself the last, and not a hair of their head touched.

"sheds forth" His Spirit (ii. 33) : answers their prayers (iv. 31) : makes known His purposes (xviii. 10). Yes, the Living Christ behind the Veil is the key to the Acts of the Apostles.—"The message, going forth from the upper chamber, spread to temples, houses, streets, market-places, inns, prisons, camps, courts, chariots, ships, countries, cities, islands; to Jews, Gentiles, magistrates, officers, soldiers, eunuchs, prisoners, slaves, freemen, women, children, sailors; reaching finally Athens and Rome."<sup>1</sup> And when the last page of this Book has been written we shall then understand as we never understood before the fulness of the great Master's Promise—"Lo, I am with you," every inch of the way, "all the days," every minute of the day, "even unto the end of the world."

In verse eight the missionaries of the Cross had come down to Troas : it was the beach of the narrow strait that divides Asia from Europe. Many a conqueror had trodden that famous shore : Xerxes, Julius Cæsar, Alexander of Macedon. Troas was the ancient Troy, and it was of this place that Homer sang his glorious song of the Trojan war, and now the Evangelists of the conquering Christ had come to teach a nobler, sweeter song, the new Song of the Saviour's dying Love, of which Homer had never dreamed. It was at Troas St. Paul saw a vision, the vision of a man wanting help.<sup>2</sup> They at once decided to cross over to Europe.

I think most boys and girls dream dreams and see visions of what they will be and do in the years to come.

<sup>1</sup> Bengel, *Gnomon Acts of the Apostles*.

<sup>2</sup> Vision was joined with duty. This thought is very beautifully expressed by Longfellow in "The Legend Beautiful," where he describes one in deep contrition and prayer, when the Vision of Christ in unwonted splendour appeared. "Wondering, worshipping, adoring," he knelt lost in rapture, when the bell summoned him to the discharge of what seemed a menial duty, to dole alms to beggars at the gate. For a moment he hesitated, unwilling to leave his radiant Guest.

"Then a Voice within his breast  
Whispered audible and clear  
As if to the outward ear,  
'Do your duty; that is best;  
Leave unto thy LORD the rest.'"

He obeyed and went forth on this errand of mercy, and when he returned the Vision was still there, and with deep significance said, "Hadst thou stayed, I must have fled!"

But the vision I want you to see is a vision of men wanting help. Early last century there was a school-boy at Harrow, Anthony Ashley Cooper, afterwards seventh Earl of Shaftesbury. One day a pauper's funeral was passing, and the boy looked at it with sad eyes, for the rude cart was in charge of two half-drunken men. There was an upset and the poor coffin fell into the street and was broken. The gruesome sight touched the noble heart of the boy, and wakened in him a passionate purpose to live for the poor of his land, and all England knows how he kept his solemn vow. Yes, I want you to see a vision like that. And I want you to act on it too. When St. Paul "had seen the vision, *straightway* we sought to go forth into Macedonia." "Straightway" the Gospel was carried into Europe. It was a matter of life and death. And it is a matter of life and death that we see visions and act on them too.

i. *The Sabbath.* Of which George Herbert most beautifully said :—

"O day most calm, most bright ! . . .  
The week were dark but for thy light."

It is the oldest religious institution in the world : one of the two sweet relics of Eden. The blessed Sabbath morning says, "Lift up your hearts." Happy those who by God's grace can reply, "We lift them up unto the Lord." And how miserable must he be who has to confess, "E'en Sunday shines no Sabbath Day to me." Dr. Newman truly said, "Satan's first attempt when he would ruin a man's soul is to prevail on him to desecrate the Lord's Day." And if there were no Fourth Commandment, since I believe that the Son of GOD died for my sins and rose again on Sunday morning for my justification surely I must keep holy the blessed Sabbath Day with its weekly message from Christ's empty Grave. And more and more I shall find these holy Days are

"Bright shadows of true rest ; some shoots of bliss ;  
Heaven once a week ;  
The next world's gladness prepossessed in this ;  
A Day to seek  
Eternity in time ; time's bower ;  
The narrow way ;  
Transplanted Paradise ; God's walking hour ;  
The cool o' the day ;



The creation's jubilee ; God's parle with dust ;  
 Heaven here ; man on those hills of myrrh, of flowers ;  
 Angels descending ; the returns of trust ;  
 A gleam of glory after six days' showers."

—VAUGHAN (1695).<sup>1</sup>

The Christian Sunday is the first Day of the week. It throws its blessed shadow forward to bless and sanctify the days to come for new labour and new service.

ii. *The Place.* It was by a river. Here is an extract from Charles Kingsley's *Life* : "June 12, 1841—My birthnight. I have been for the last hour on the sea-shore, not dreaming, but thinking deeply and strongly, and forming determinations which are to affect my destiny through time and through eternity. Before the sleeping earth and the sleepless sea and stars I have devoted myself to GOD ; a vow never (if He gives me the faith I pray for) to be recalled."<sup>2</sup>

iii. *The Prayer.* Those who can pray have the best anchor in the worst of storms. We may have a blessed sense of the Presence of GOD in private, but the highest kind of prayer is common prayer, prayer with others. There is great force in those words of Joseph Hart—

"Prayer was appointed to convey  
 The blessings GOD designs to give."

It is like a little key which opens all the doors of a great house. All brave souls have been men and women of prayer. From Pentecost till now every Christlike life has been steeped in prayer. Every true revival has been begun by prayer. As long as we are in this world we shall need times and places for prayer.

iv. *The Sermon.* That Sermon was the means by which the Lord opened the heart of Lydia.<sup>3</sup> The meet-

<sup>1</sup> Henry Vaughan owed his conversion to George Herbert : in the Preface to *Silex Scintillans* he writes of "the blessed man, Mr. George Herbert, whose holy life and verse gained many converts, of whom I am the least."

<sup>2</sup> Vol i. p. 35.

<sup>3</sup> Woman has been uplifted ever since she began to sit at the Feet of Jesus. His treatment of women is in sharp contrast to the best Oriental religions. Her lot among Greeks and Romans was subjugation, among heathen races polygamy. Christ set up a new ideal, and it was He Who taught St. Paul to write—"In Christ Jesus there can be neither male nor female." It is Christ, and Christ alone, Who uplifts woman, hallows the home, and frees the slave.

ing between St. Paul and Lydia had been arranged in Heaven. She was the first convert in Europe. Her history is one of the blessed romances of the Gospel. We say, "Only a Sermon!" Yet I sometimes think if we knew the multitudes who are saved from despair by Sermons preached from Christian pulpits we should be amazed. Many a man almost overwhelmed with the sorrows and difficulties of life, by the words he hears on Sundays gets strength to hope, to struggle, and to triumph.

Only a Sermon! Yet a Sermon—if it is, as it ought to be, a good word for Jesus Christ—may be the turning-point in a life: some weary eyes may for the first time see the heavenly vision, and find their way to the Cross and the empty Tomb, and henceforth "walk in newness of life." But it is not by human might or power that these great things are done; it is by the gracious Spirit of GOD, it is by the Holy Ghost sent down from Heaven, and by Him *alone*. Charles Simeon said most truly:—"When the Word of God is applied by the Holy Spirit with power, the stoutest heart in the universe trembles; when it is poured out as balm, the most afflicted creature under heaven is made to exult with joy."

## XXIII

### PREVENTING GRACE

*And great grace<sup>1</sup> was upon them all.*—ACTS iv. 33.

WHAT a difference there is between genius and grace. The world admires genius : genius in art and literature, music and science, yes, and in commerce and money-making. Genius is the gift of God, but by no means His choicest gift. It is infinitely better to be among the heroes of faith than a giant in intellect.

Milton describes the repentance of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost*, when they confessed their sin, and prayed for forgiveness—

“Thus they in lowliest plight repentant stood  
Praying; for from the mercy seat above  
Prevenient grace descending had removed  
The stony from their hearts, and made new flesh  
Regenerate grow instead.”

“Prevenient grace.” The old theologians used to speak of “prevenient grace,” or “preventing grace”—they meant, grace going before. Do you remember the first good desire for spiritual things you ever had? Something came before that. It was grace. Do you remember the first real prayer you ever prayed? Something went before. It was preventing grace. Do you remember the first tear you shed for sin? There was something before—it was grace. Do you remember your first act of faith, when you came to the great decision, and made the great venture? There was something before : God’s preventing grace. Do you know when you nearly fell over the precipice, what it was that kept you from falling? It was God’s grace. If you go down to the heart of things as an artesian well goes down to the great

<sup>1</sup> The word “Grace” occurs about 146 times in the New Testament—twenty-one occasions outside St. Paul’s and St. Luke’s writings. Cf. “Thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness” (Ps. xxi. 3).

reservoir that lies deep down in the green sand, you will find you owe all that is good in you to that Grace which has prevented and followed you all your days.

In St. Luke xvii. 10, R.V., our Lord has anticipated the teaching of St. Paul as to the impossibility of a man's being saved by his works—"Even so ye also, when ye shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do." Those who have done all they were commanded have nothing to boast, they can lay claim to no merit, for themselves or to give others. Then what can be said of us who have done what we ought not to have done, and have left undone what we ought to have done? St. Augustine said :—

"By grace ye are saved. When thou hearest by grace, understand gratis. If then gratis, thou hast brought nothing of thine own—hast merited nothing. For if anything is repaid to merit, it is reward, not grace. By grace ye are saved, through faith." And Dr. Arnot's words are well worth quoting: "Every one whom Christ has sought and found, and borne to the fold, feels and confesses that, if the Shepherd had not come to the sheep, the sheep would not have come to the Shepherd. If any wanderer still hesitates on the question, Who brought him home? it is time that he should begin to entertain another question, Whether he has yet been brought home at all?"

One of his clergy was dining with Bishop Porteus, and he noticed with contempt the line of a hymn, "A sinner saved by grace alone," expecting the Bishop would join in condemning it; instead he looked very solemnly at the clergyman and said, "Pray, sir, can you tell me of any other way by which a sinner can be saved?"

Christ is the inexhaustible fountain of Grace. There is plenteous grace in Him. Josephine Butler had a dream when her noble work led her into the paths of misunderstanding and bitter attack: "I thought I was lying flat with a restful feeling on a smooth, still sea, a boundless ocean, with no limit, no shore, on any side. It was strong and held me up, and there was light and sunshine all around me. And I heard a voice say,

‘Such is the grace of God.’ ” Or to quote from *The Pilgrim’s Progress*: “We seldom sit down to meat, but we eat, and leave. So there is in Jesus Christ more merit and righteousness than the whole world has need of.”

There is a beautiful verse in one of Faber’s hymns—

“Give us of Thy graces,  
Chiefly love and fear ;  
And, dear Lord, the chiefest,  
Grace to persevere.”

We need “grace to persevere” as much as ever we needed “preventing grace.” There is One with the Pierced Hands Who welcomes all who come, and sends none empty away. “I am willing with all My Heart,” says He. “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace,” the throne on which grace is throned, the throne from which grace proceeds, “that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. iv. 16). You have, perhaps, thought of GOD as a God of law, Who makes righteous demands on men, that is well : but He is much more the God of grace, coming to men’s help, stooping to bear their sins and sorrows.

Henry Drummond writes of a poem which bears the strange title “Strife in Heaven.” “The poet supposes himself,” says Drummond, “to be walking along the streets of the New Jerusalem. Presently he comes upon a crowd of saints who are engaged in earnest discussion. He draws near and listens. The question they are discussing is, which of them is the greatest monument of God’s saving grace. After a long debate, in which each states his case separately, and claims to have been by far the most wonderful trophy of God’s love in all the multitude of the redeemed, it is finally agreed to settle the matter by vote. Vote after vote is taken, and the list of competitors gradually reduced until only two remain. These are allowed to state their case again, and the company stand ready to join in the final vote. The first to speak is a very old man. He begins by saying that it is mere waste of time to go any further ; it is absolutely impossible that God’s grace



could have done more for any man in heaven than for him. He tells again how he had led a most wicked and vicious life; a life filled up with every conceivable indulgence, and marred with every conceivable crime. He has been a thief, a liar, a blasphemer, a drunkard, a murderer. On his death-bed, at the eleventh hour, Christ came to him and he was forgiven. The other is also an old man, who says in a few words that he was brought to Christ when a boy. He had led a quiet, uneventful life and had looked forward to heaven as long as he could remember. The vote is taken, and, of course, you would say that it results in favour of the first. But no; all the votes are given to the last. We might have thought that the reckless, godless old man, who came to Christ on crutches, had most to thank God for. But the old poet knew the deeper truth. It verily required great grace to pluck that withered brand from the burning; great depths of mercy to forgive that veteran in sin at the close of all those guilty years. But it required more grace to keep that other life from guilt during all those tempted years; to save him from the sins of youth; to crown his days with usefulness; his old age with patience and honour. Both came to Christ, the one at the end, the other at the beginning of life. The first was saved from *dying* in sin; the other became a Christian in boyhood and was saved from *living* in sin."

## XXIV

### TRUST AND DO

*Trust in the LORD, and do good.*—PSALM xxxvii. 3.

HERE is the essence of true religion, the science of salvation, the duty of man. It is so simple, a child can understand it. It is GOD's way of peace. For we ought to work *from* life, not for life. We should not work in order that we may be saved, but we are saved in order that we may work. Note well the order of the words—Trust . . . and do. Trust and obey, but trust comes first. And remember there is the Beatitude of the doer—"If ye know these things, blessed are ye if ye do them" (St. John xiii. 17, R.V.).

i. *The religion of Christ has an emotional side.* Intellectual conviction is not saving faith. St. Paul says, "With the *heart* man believeth" (Romans x. 10). By "the heart" he includes what we call the feelings as well as the mind and conscience and will, in fact the whole inner life. The trust of the heart means the trust of the man himself, with all his powers of emotion and intellect and conscience and will. To follow Christ is the work of a lifetime. To trust Christ may be the act of a moment. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," not only in a far-distant future, but here and now. There is a story told of a lunatic (I think in an asylum) who asked a stranger—"Have you ever thanked GOD for your reason? I have lost mine." We do well indeed to thank GOD for our reason, but if we have faith we have infinitely greater reason to thank HIM.

"The heart that trusts, for ever sings  
And feels as light as it had wings;  
A well of peace within it springs;  
Come good or ill,  
Whate'er to-day, to-morrow brings,  
It is His will."

—ISAAC WILLIAMS.

ii. *The religion of Christ has a practical side.* Trust and do. Not, Believe and be happy, but, Believe and do well. Show your faith by your works. Our Lord warns us in the Sermon on the Mount that "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father Who is in Heaven (St. Mattt. vii. 21). And mark how He closes that Sermon (verses 24-28). Over the grave of Dr. John Cairns there are two inscriptions, one in Latin, the other in English. The Latin words are: "In Te, Domine, speravi; non confundar in eternum" —"In Thee, O Lord, have I trusted; let me never be confounded." The English inscription is: "I am among you as he that serveth." Trust and serve. "Trust in the Lord and do good." This is the way to live great lives in small places. It is probably not our circumstances that are at fault but ourselves. Our duty and our happiness lie, not in forsaking the place where GOD has put us, but in transfiguring it. Do good every day and everywhere to all men, but especially to them that are of the household of faith. Sympathise with sorrow and suffering wherever you find it. Stop to 'wash every foot stained with earth's dust, and heal every foot stabbed with earth's thorns.' "Work out your own salvation," but be sure you have salvation first, for no man can "beat his music out" unless there is music in him.

"Do the work that's nearest,  
Though its dull at whiles,  
Helping, when you meet them,  
Lame dogs over stiles."<sup>1</sup>

"A little thing is a little thing, but faithfulness in little things is a very great thing," said St. Chrysostom. A monk prayed to know where he would sit in Paradise, and in answer had a dream in which he found himself at the feet of an old washerwoman who neither tore nor wore the garments entrusted to her. "Trust in the LORD, and do good," and then you never know what GOD may do by you. In the fourteenth century, the worst days of Christendom, there lived a humble dyer's daughter, Catherine of Siena, and by the grace of GOD she became

<sup>1</sup> Charles Kingsley.

an immense blessing to the time in which she lived. And Cranmer, Latimer, and Ridley lighted a candle which is burning still.

"The greatest thing a man can do for his heavenly Father, is to be kind to some of His other children," said George Macdonald in one of his works. You may say, "I cannot build a Church, or endow a charity; I cannot, like Howard, visit the prisons of Europe, or like Wilberforce help to free the slave, or like Lord Shaftesbury abridge the hours of factory labour." No, but you can do something for the love of CHRIST, you can be kind to some of God's other children. How vain to go about "seeking for some great thing to do, or secret thing to know," when there is something to be done at once, perhaps next door, or probably nearer still, in your own home. To quote Charles Kingsley again—

"Be good, sweet maid, and let who can be clever,  
Do lovely things, not dream them, all day long;  
And so make Life, and Death, and that For Ever  
One grand, sweet song."

St. Paul teaches the same as the Hebrew Psalmist. Here is one of the "faithful Sayings"<sup>1</sup>—that is to say, sayings that can be trusted without fail: they were current in the Church in the early days, and St. Paul wrote them in his Epistles and made them immortal. "This is a faithful Saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they who have believed in GOD might be careful to maintain good works" (Titus iii. 8). "He who feels weary of life may be sure he does not love his fellow-creatures as he ought," says Sir A. Helps.

Men are remembered by what they *did*. "The glory of a nation," said Westcott, "like the glory of a citizen or a class, consists, not in supremacy, but in service." Who that loves Cowper can ever forget Mary Unwin and all she was to him and all she did for him?

"There is a book  
By seraphs writ with beams of heavenly light,  
On which the Eyes of God not rarely look,  
A chronicle of actions just and bright:  
There all thy deeds, my faithful Mary, shine,  
And, since thou ownest that praise, I spare thee mine."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The other "faithful Sayings" are: I Timothy i. 15; iv. 8, 9;  
II Timothy ii. 11, 12, 13.

<sup>2</sup> Cowper, to Mrs. Unwin.

"If I can only place a little brick" (said Phillips Brooks) "in the pavement of the LORD'S pathway I will place it there, that coming generations may walk thereon to the heavenly City." "Trust in the LORD and do good."



## THE IMPREGNABLE ROCK

*And in His Name shall the Gentiles trust.*—ST. MATTHEW  
xii. 21.

TO the Jew the Name of Jehovah meant the revealed Personal GOD in whom he trusted. In the New Testament Jesus Christ is the Revelation of God, and "The Name" was infinitely more than a sacred Word—it was Christ Himself. *Cf.* Acts iv. 12 and 3 St. John 7, "For the sake of the Name they went forth," evidently meaning, for the sake of Christ.

The golden core of the Gospel is that the salvation of all believers comes through Christ, and through Him alone. On the top of a church tower in Norway is the carved figure of a lamb. When the church was being built a workman fell from the high scaffold. His fellow-workmen saw him fall, and, horror-stricken, rushed down, expecting to find him dashed to pieces, but to their glad surprise he was little hurt. A flock of sheep was passing at the moment of his fall, he fell among them as they were crowded together, and directly on a lamb. The lamb was crushed, the man was saved.

You tell me the difficulties of faith are great. I tell you the difficulties of unbelief are greater. In the early days "not many wise men after the flesh" became disciples (1 Cor. i. 26). It is so still. But it is helpful and encouraging to remember that the pioneers of science were Christians. Galileo said the earth moved, and was compelled to kneel in penitence for having so taught. In rising from his knees he whispered, "It moves all the same"—Galileo was a believer in Christ. Copernicus was a faithful parish priest,—when his book that made a new epoch in human thought was placed in his dying hands he said, "Now, Lord, lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace." Kepler as he traced the movement of stars said in oft-quoted words, "O

God, I only think Thy Thoughts after Thee." Isaac Newton was meek and lowly in heart, and had the simple faith of a child. Lord Rosebery said of Lord Kelvin: "First and foremost, it was a strength and happiness to many that so great a man of science could be so great a Christian; but, apart from faith, he possessed the noblest moral qualities."

Listen to the challenge of the son of Sirach: "Look at the generations of old and see; did ever any trust in the Lord, and was confounded? or did any abide in His fear and was forsaken? or whom did He ever despise, that called upon Him?" (Ecclesiasticus ii. 10). "Can a man die safely who has believed at one time?" asked the Protector of Thomas Goodwin, his friend and chaplain. "No," replied the great Puritan, "no, my lord, you must die believing."

Canon Fleming<sup>1</sup> was preaching one Sunday evening in 1898 at St. Margaret's, Westminster. "Towards the close he told with great power, which made us all vividly realise the scene, the story of a dying blind girl. The clergyman called to see her. She asked him to turn to Hebrews vii. 25. He did so. 'Have you got it?' said she eagerly. 'Yes,' said he, and he quietly read the words, 'Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.' Said the blind girl, 'Now, put my finger on that text.' Then she added, 'I die on that text: He is able and willing, He ever liveth; and I commit myself to His care and keeping.' She sank back on her bed, fell into a peaceful slumber, and soon after passed away to the better land. Then he finished with a pointed appeal to those who were in health to emulate the dying girl's confession of faith in the Living Saviour."

It is a simple thing to trust Christ. Look at His Wounds. Look up to His Face. Fall at His Feet.

A man was sitting in a thoughtful mood, when a friend approached him, and asked why he was so serious and what he was thinking about? He replied, "I was trying to think what it will be like five minutes after death." Yes, think of *that*, and then make the great venture.

<sup>1</sup> *Life*, pp. 240, 241.

## XXVI

### THE COMPASSION OF CHRIST

*And Jesus, when He came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and He began to teach them many things.*—ST. MARK. vi. 34.

A CROWD awakes different feelings in the hearts of different men. Horace said, "I hate the common herd and keep them at a distance." In Christ it awoke pity. He looked at the crowd with his beautiful compassionate Eyes. He saw into each heart with its sins and sorrows. There was the spring of youth. There was the winter of age. How many were almost fainting with disappointed hopes, how many were sick with sin and sorrow. And He saw all. For tenderness and pity were the law of the Redeemer's life.

"His Face a gentle sadness wore,  
As if He suffered too."<sup>1</sup>

The moving of Christ's compassionate Heart is the great hope of men, as you will learn from the following passages in St. Matthew: xiv. 14; xv. 32; xx. 34. He seemed to have a special compassion for the poor and the sad. You can see this by the way in which He spoke of Lazarus at the rich man's gate, and how He noticed that the poor were seldom asked out to dine.

Great is the power of sympathy. The successful preacher, for instance, is always sympathetic. Some one was remarking on James Vaughan's<sup>2</sup> extraordinary power of interesting boys and girls. "Ah," said he, "the secret is to look at everything with a child's eye." But not only preachers:—John Howard seldom

<sup>1</sup> "Nothing but the infinite Compassion can suffice for the infinite pathos of human life."

<sup>2</sup> James Vaughan was one of the meek of heart, and was refreshed—as the meek are—in the multitude of peace. George Wagner attributed his spiritual life to James Vaughan's Sermons.

entered one of the dismal prisons of Europe without tears, and Macaulay says his father, when Governor of Sierra Leone, could not see a company of female slaves pass him by without being dazed and stunned for hours.

But if you would realise the depth of Christ's Compassion you must turn to the twenty-sixth chapter of St. Matthew, and go in spirit to the garden of Gethsemane,<sup>1</sup> where the Saviour asks whether the Cup of which He was about to drink might not be laid aside, whether, in plain words, it were absolutely necessary that He should die. "O my Father, if it be possible, let this Cup pass from ME: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt" (verse 39).

*"This was compassion like a God,  
That when the Saviour knew  
The price of pardon was His Blood,  
His Pity ne'er withdrew."*<sup>2</sup>

Heaven and Hell were real to him. Their occupants were real too.

The compassion of Christ is unique. There is none like it. He was (to use words attributed to St. Paul in an ancient apocryphal document) "the only one Who sympathised with a world that had lost its way."

Learn compassion from the Compassion of CHRIST. Doddridge preached on the text, "I beheld the transgressors and was grieved because they kept not Thy Law," and wrote a hymn to clinch his own sermon—

*"Arise, my tenderest thoughts, arise,  
To torrents melt my streaming eyes!  
And thou, my heart, with anguish feel  
Those evils which thou canst not heal!"*

It is, as Dr. Stanford, his biographer, says, not so much a poem as a cry, a wail over lost souls. "Perhaps he was unconscious of the words. There was a vivid moment when, like a seer, he saw mad millions of sinners—was in an agony to save them, felt desperate with a sense of helplessness, and cried out thus." Let

<sup>1</sup> St. Luke says the disciples were "sleeping for sorrow." That was one of those little touches with which he frequently apologises for the failings of the Twelve. The physician knew how the distracted and wearied mind is renewed and refreshed as its sorrow is forgotten in sleep.

<sup>2</sup> Isaac Watts.

us pray for "a heart of compassion" (Col. iii. 12, R.V.), a heart like Christ's pitiful Heart. For wondrous is the force of sympathy. It is said that our wounded soldiers in the Crimea would kiss the shadow of Florence Nightingale, as it fell on their pillows. Pray, I say again, for "a heart of compassion"—it is a broken light of GOD. It seems sad that in the richest country in the world any should die of starvation. But for one starved to death for want of food many are starved for want of sympathy. Multitudes pine for love who never want bread.

Quintin Hogg (who founded the Polytechnic) was just going for his holiday when the cholera broke out. It was of course at its worst in the slums. Without a second thought he gave up his holiday. Now hear what he says—"Almost the first day in the district assigned me made me forget any feeling of regret I might have had. I found a little boy lying helpless, almost unconscious . . . Taking an orange from my pocket, I squeezed some of the juice into his mouth, and tried to nurse him as best I knew how, though, poor fellow, his condition was such as to make him anything but attractive. Foul as to his linen, foul as to his body, there was little beautiful about him, except the childlike gratitude he had for perhaps the only kindly treatment he had known for many a long day. When I was going away, he put up his arms and said, 'Do kiss me, sir, no one has ever kissed me since my mother died.'"

"Jesus . . . was moved with compassion." And He is still the same. Though now on His Head are many diadems, yet "His compassions fail not." And He has power as well as pity.

"Friend to help us, cheer us, save us,  
In Whom power and pity blend—  
Praise we must, the grace that gave us  
Jesus Christ, the sinners' Friend!"<sup>1</sup>

For when He rose from the dead one of the many priceless legacies He left to all the ages that were coming was His Compassion.

<sup>1</sup> Newman Hall.



## XXVII

### THE GREATEST COMMISSION

*And He ordained twelve, that they should be with Him, and that He might send them forth to preach.*—ST. MARK iii. 14.

JOHN BUNYAN'S ideal of what a Christian minister should be may be seen in his seven ministerial portraits: Evangelist, the picture in the Interpreter's House, Greatheart, and the four Shepherds on the Delectable Mountains—Knowledge, Experience, Watchful, Sincere. "And who is sufficient for these things?"

i. *They were to be with Jesus.* Fra Angelico well said, "He who would do the work of Christ must dwell continually with Him." For where else can we see the vision of the Almighty, and if we have not seen the vision ourselves, how can we help others to see it? In the four Gospels Christ is called Teacher forty-four times, and if He has not taught us, how can we teach others? Moody's boy once came into his father's study. "What do you want, my boy?" said Moody. "Nothing, father, only to be where you are."

Take the case of Phillips Brooks, one of the great preachers of last century. When he was at Harvard University he did not seem to possess special gifts in any direction. After he took his degree he began school teaching, as a temporary means of getting his living, and he failed, for he was not able to control a classroom of boys. *Then he definitely consecrated his life to God.* And a wonderful thing happened. Extraordinary powers of composition and imagination awoke within him, and the man who could not speak at College, became one of the greatest preachers.

ii. *They were to be sent forth to preach.* Mark Pattison put the question, "What is most worth living for?" And he answered it thus: "To deliver one's message."

Let every one who would be a preacher indeed lay to heart the weighty words of Alexander Macleod :

“For myself, I believe that preaching is our great work, and apart from our own spiritual life, sermon-making our most central duty. I am not ashamed of sermons, nor of sermon-writing . . . I know no work higher. There is none I would exchange with it. I only wish I could describe, as emphatically as I perceive it, the place which the preparation of the sermon should have in our regard. It should be our main current of thought. The thoughts, the reading, the conversation, the prayers, the sufferings, the sorrows, the joys, the sympathies of the week, and of the life, should run naturally into it. What a noble medium it is for thought ! How easily it admits the highest and homeliest we can bring . . . Think of it with reference to those who are to hear. It is thought and reading to at least half of every congregation. It is suggestion and spur to the other half. What a delight to ourselves to listen to a really good sermon ! How deeply we thank the man who preaches it ! Let it be our ambition to compose such sermons. Let us give our best and freshest and most sustained thought to the work . . . We are speakers for GOD. And it is due to Him to make our sermons the best we can. It is not a wrong ambition to make them beautiful, even as works of art. They *are* works of art. It is our week’s poem, and we are the poets . . . Bring all that Bible-skill and scholarship can supply . . . All nature is a parable to him who has eyes to see, and do not scorn to use what of this parable lies about your feet.”

A word may change a life. “A word changed me,” said Savonarola, but he never told the word, or who spoke it. By the preaching of the Evangel, troubled souls are calmed, broken lives are uplifted, people of unblemished morality are led to renounce any merit of their own, and receive Christ as their Saviour. And the preacher’s indirect influence is often very great. It is said that one of Robertson’s congregation in Brighton used to have a portrait of the great preacher in a little back room, behind the shop, and whenever he was tempted to do a mean or ignoble thing, he would go

and look at that portrait, and its influence would be a check to the wrong, and an impulse towards the right. Young men have done the same with their mother's portrait, and for the same reason.

"There is need of him yet," said the sage of Chelsea of the preacher. There is certainly need of those who will teach and preach Jesus Christ. Did you ever see an auctioneer selling a picture, perhaps the masterpiece of a great artist? He hides himself behind it; if he can, he hides the tips of his fingers, and is utterly invisible. There is the secret of effective preaching—to efface self, so that only Christ is seen.

"In the early Christian history you may see the Apostles being led into truth of which they had not dreamed, truth against which all the prejudices of their race and age and education fought, but to the belief of which they came unflinchingly. In the Epistles, these dull, slow scholars become teachers; they reproduce the teaching of Christ in new forms. Practically the Epistles are the principles of Christ's teaching developed and applied. There is hardly anything in them the germ of which may not be found in His Words. . . . He read their mistaken views, but He read also their deep affection, their firm faith, their uttermost devotion. In that soil He has sown His seed, and it must germinate. The sower can afford to wait; according to His Own Parable, He will sleep and rise, and the seed shall spring up and grow. When He is no longer with them, the Spirit shall carry on His work and reap His harvest. . . . Most evidently a multitude of seeds of truth sown by Christ through all the days of His ministry, lay dormant in them until the Spirit was given. It is said that after the great fire in London plants sprang up, the seeds of which must have lain for years in the soil. The fire made way for them and set them free: perhaps too it fitted the soil to the seed, or even the seed to the soil. A similar thing is observed after the great forest fires in South America; trees spring up then very distinct from those which constituted the former vegetation.<sup>1</sup> Seeds which were in the soil not only survive the fire, but may almost be said to be quickened by it. And the fire of the trial that came upon these disciples burnt up the surface vegetation, the natural products of the men; it prepared the soil and enriched it, so that that other Paraclete Whom He sent found the soil ready when He came. He found the seed living and ready to spring. He watched over it, nourished it with sun and shower; and the harvest was not Pentecost merely, it was Christianity."—*The Silent Christ*, by late Rev. W. W. Sidey.

<sup>1</sup> Balfour's *Botany*, p. 349.

## XXVIII

### “I HOLD AND AM HELD”

*My soul followeth hard after Thee: Thy Right Hand upholdeth me.*—PSALM lxiii. 8.

MANY of our dearest Psalms were no doubt written by David.<sup>1</sup> How versatile was his genius—sovereign, statesman, soldier, singer, all in one. But the best things he left us were his prayers and his songs. Our day is a day of hurry and pleasure, and feverish thirst for gold, and many do not make time to watch with Christ one hour. “Before prayer prepare thy soul, and be not as one that tempteth GOD.” But we do not give ourselves time to prepare our souls, and our Bible is not read as it should be, and meditation is almost a lost art. But David left us songs, as well as prayers, for he has been singing the songs of Zion all down the ages:—songs full of trust in GOD, songs of hope and good cheer. These songs have a strange power of lifting men out of darkness into the sunlit heights. They linger in the memory like the soft sound of bells floating over the sea; they not only console, they inspire. Lowell said—“The spiritual thirst of mankind had for ages been quenched at Hebrew fountains.” And many of those fountains were David’s. One of the most interesting books published of late years is *The Psalms in Human Life*, by Rowland E. Prothero, and nearly at the end of that book the author says: “When the pages of some ancient brown bound volume are turned, there flutters from between the leaves the withered petal of a rose. The flower is faded, dry, scentless; but it has imprinted

<sup>1</sup> If this were not so, the truths enshrined in those Psalms would not be affected. Suppose it were proved that Bacon wrote plays usually ascribed to Shakespeare, would all those plays immediately become worthless? By no means. Their messages, their teaching, would be as valuable as ever. Truth is always truth by whomsoever uttered.

something of its shape and colour on the pages between which it has been pressed. As it floats to the ground, the most unimaginative of us is conscious of the desire to read its secret. What moment of joy or sorrow, of despair or hope, did it commemorate in the distant days, when the page was yet unstained, the petal full of fragrance and colour, the hand that placed it there still throbbing with life? Something similar is the effect of studying the Psalms through human history. There is scarcely a leaf in the Psalter which is not stained by some withered flower of the past . . . As we read the familiar verses, the words bring before us, one by one, the hundreds of men and women who, passing from tribulation into joy, have, in the language of the Psalms, conquered the terrors of death, proclaimed their faith, or risen to new effort and final victory." This Psalm was written under touching circumstances. David was an exile through the rebellion of his son Absalom.

"Ingratitude! thou marble-hearted fiend,  
More hideous, when thou show'st thee in a child,  
Than the sea-monster.

How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is  
To have a thankless child!"

i. *Prayer.* David encourages himself in GOD. He knew what to do when the worst comes to the worst. There is a parallel case up to a certain point in English history. The sons of Henry II. leagued with France against him, only his youngest son remaining at Court. But when he learned that John also had turned against him, he exclaimed, "Let everything go as it will." In a few days he died of a broken heart. And so David would have died, but he turned to GOD in Whom he found a sure Refuge, even when he was hard by the gates of despair. God provides in strange and unexpected ways. He often builds the fairest palaces on broken ruins.

"Say not, my soul, from whence can GOD relieve my care,  
Remember that Omnipotence has servants everywhere."

Prayer is speaking to GOD, and through GOD you



can speak to man, even though that man may be far away.

"The weary ones had rest, the sad had joy  
That day, and wondered 'how.'  
A ploughman, singing at his work, had prayed,  
'Lord, help them now.'

Away in foreign lands they wondered how  
Their simple word had power.  
At home, the Christians two or three had met  
To pray an hour.

Yes, we are always wond'ring, wond'ring 'how':  
Because we do not see  
Someone, unknown perhaps, and far away,  
On bended knee!"<sup>1</sup>

ii. *Faith*. "My soul followeth hard after Thee, Thy Right Hand has firm hold on me." The soul, always clinging, always held. Dr. Kay, in his book on The Psalms, well and truly says—"Problems, which have occupied hundreds of controversial treatises, as to the relation of Divine Grace and human will, have their solution in this one verse."

"Let me no more my comfort draw  
From my frail hold of Thee:  
In this alone rejoice with awe—  
Thy mighty grasp of me."

iii. *Praise*: verse 3.

"He that hath led me hitherto  
Will lead me all my journey through,  
And give me daily cause to raise  
New Ebenezers to His Praise."<sup>2</sup>

iv. *Joy*: verse 7. The Hebrew Psalmist might well rejoice. He was no pantheist, burying God in His Own creation. He did not doubt that GOD was immanent, in the world, nor that GOD was transcendent, above the world: but he was sure GOD could and would answer prayer—his own experience, the experience of long and stormy years, taught him that.

<sup>1</sup> From "*How*" and *Other Poems*, by F. M. N. By permission. A most charming little book. (S. W. Partridge & Co.)

<sup>2</sup> John Newton.

## XXIX

### “SORROWFUL, YET ALWAYS REJOICING”

*Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.*—2 COR. vi. 10.

THE city of Corinth was situated on a narrow neck of land between two seas, the Adriatic and the Ægean. One brought the commerce of Europe, the other the merchandise of Asia. It was London and Paris in one. The gay city sat as a queen, and gave herself to the pleasure of the hour. She was an object lesson to prove that neither philosophy nor art nor culture can ever change the heart or uplift the life of man. It was to the Church of God in this heathen city that St. Paul wrote his two Epistles.

I expect there were many reasons why St. Paul was “sorrowful.” Perhaps he grieved for sins committed long ago, for forgiven sin, or because friends were few, discouragements many, and the powers of wrong so mighty. “I saw in my dream,” says a poet, “two fountains flowing side by side. One was a fountain of joy and the other of tears. And a voice said to me, ‘These two fountains flow together all through human life. God makes them flow together that from one His children may learn gratitude, and from the other trust.’” St. Paul was no exception to this. All the saints have had some distressing cross. Think of St. Paul’s “thorn in the flesh,” or Richard Baxter’s chronic ill-health, or Robert Hall’s recurring paroxysms of pain, or George Matheson’s blindness.

“Trial, God’s alchemist of old,  
Shall purge away the dross and mould,  
And leave us rich in gems and gold.”<sup>1</sup>

Bishop Latimer was journeying through his diocese,

<sup>1</sup> “Afflictions are a blessing to us when we can bless God for affliction. Suffering has kept many from sinning. God had one Son without sin; but He never had one without sorrow. Fiery trials make golden Christians. Sanctified afflictions are spiritual promotions.” DYER. (See 1 St. Peter i. 5-9.)

and he put up at a farmer's house. As soon as he was seated, the farmer began to tell of his prosperity, and how he had never had a cross in his life. "Oh," said the Bishop, "bring me my horse, I cannot stay here, for I am sure God is not in this house."

"Yet always rejoicing," St. Paul added, for like Benjamin Parsons his head was resting on three pillows—Infinite Power, Infinite Love, and Infinite Wisdom. "There is no duty we so much underrate," says Robert Louis Stevenson, "as the duty of being happy. A happy man or woman is a better thing to find than a five-pound note. He is or she is a radiating force of goodwill, and their entrance into a room is as though another candle had been lighted." And certainly—

"All who joy would win  
Must share it,—Happiness was born a twin."<sup>1</sup>

"Yet always rejoicing." For you must remember that there are more helps than discouragements in the Christian life.

There is always the Living Christ, Who abideth ever, and the mighty inspiration of His Love.

There is always the Cross, and the empty grave, and all they mean.

There is the holy teaching of childhood, which some of us can never forget and would not if we could.

There are "exceeding great and precious Promises," in which all the saints have trusted, and never found one to fail.

There is the LORD'S Table, with all its tender memories.

There are those we love, who, like Agnes in *David Copperfield*, are pointing upwards.

There is the remembrance of the sainted dead who sing—

"Come in, come in;  
Eternal glory thou shalt win."

There are good books.

There are ministering angels.

Let me quote from a very old book :—

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<sup>1</sup> Byron.

"As when good news is come to one in grief, straightway he forgetteth his former grief, and no longer attendeth to anything except the good news which he hath heard, so do ye also having received a renewal of your soul through the beholding of these good things."<sup>1</sup>

Matthew Arnold was right when he said—"It is this which made the fortune of Christianity—its gladness, not its sorrow, its drawing from the spiritual world a source of joy so abundant that it ran over upon the material world and transfigured it." There is a famous passage in *Grace Abounding* where some poor women sat in the sun, and told their experiences. "Methought they spake as if joy did make them speak!" For he who believes in Christ has the secret of GOD in his heart, which, as A. C. Benson says, "makes him smile when he is alone." Or take the case of the famous Cornish miner, William Bray. Beautifully simple and touching are his own words: "I said to the Lord, Thou hast said, '*They that ask shall receive, they that seek shall find, and to them that knock the door shall be opened*,' and I have faith to believe it." Then he goes on to tell how everything looked new to him—the people, the fields, the cattle, the trees; he was like a man in a new world. . . . "Some said I was mad; and others that they should get me back again next pay-day. But, praise the Lord, it is now more than forty years, and they have not got me yet. They said I was a *mad*-man, but they meant I was a *glad*-man, and, Glory be to God! I have been glad ever since."<sup>2</sup> Or go back long ages, and here is Francis of Assisi, poor and ragged, wandering on his mission of love, and so filled with the joy of thankfulness that he cried—"How very good God is to us." Or Francis Xavier, so full with joy that he writes—"I prayed to God to restrain the overflowing fulness of joy which constantly fills my soul." There are some verses in one of the *Olney Hymns* which tell us "where true joys are to be found":—

" Joy is a fruit that will not grow  
In nature's barren soil;  
All we can boast till Christ we know,  
Is vanity and toil.

<sup>1</sup> Shepherd of Hermas.

<sup>2</sup> *The King's Son*, pp. 10, 11, by F. W. Bourne.

A bleeding Saviour seen by faith,  
A sense of pardoning love,  
A hope that triumphs over death,  
Give joys like those above.

To take a glimpse within the veil,  
To know that God is mine,  
Are springs of joy that never fail,  
Unspeakable ! divine !

These are the joys which satisfy,  
And sanctify the mind ;  
Which make the spirit mount on high,  
And leave the world behind."



### XXX

## THE GOLDEN SECRET

*The Son of God, Who loved me, and gave Himself for me.*—GALATIANS ii. 20.

FIRST of all, I want to draw a picture of the writer of these strikingly beautiful words. St. Paul was the great interpreter of Christ. If you will sit at his feet and learn of him, he will teach you much of the glories of Jesus. He will tell you the meaning of the Cross, and of the empty grave, and he will unfold to you the work of the Holy Spirit, and the other things a Christian ought to know and believe to his soul's health. St. Paul was an optimist; that is to say, he looked at the bright side, for there is not one despairing note in all his letters.<sup>1</sup> He never doubted the clouds would break—"Sorrowful yet always rejoicing." And how broad his sympathy! He says, "I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor. ix. 22). And then his humility. "I am the least of the Apostles." "I am less than the least of all saints." "... Sinners, of whom I am chief." If you would in any way realise the greatness of St. Paul, think first of the Churches he founded, and then of the books he wrote. When the Lord Jesus met Saul of Tarsus at the gate of Damascus, the Christian Church was only a small sect. When he was martyred, there was a chain of flourishing Churches stretching from Jerusalem to Rome, and they were mainly the work of St. Paul. As to his literary work we possess at least 13 Epistles,<sup>2</sup> and if we except the Words of our LORD,

<sup>1</sup> This is the more remarkable as he had so many things to depress him. In Raphael's great picture of St. Paul preaching on Mars Hill, he looks like a brawny village blacksmith. This is hardly correct, as St. Paul was a small, frail man, with the bleary eyes of one suffering from ophthalmia.

<sup>2</sup> Letters are often the most valuable part of a biography. In them, as Goethe truly said, a man's soul often seems to lie bare. What Wordsworth said of Milton we may say of St. Paul, "His soul was like a star, and dwelt apart." But his letters reveal him.

he has done more than any one else to shape the thought of the progressive western world. You know the 13th chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, the chapter about the love that never faileth. Dean Alford describes that chapter as "a pure and perfect gem; perhaps, the noblest assemblage of beautiful thoughts in beautiful language extant in this our world." And I think that estimate is right, of course always excepting the Words of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was a man who had learned the sacred art of prayer. If you were to extract all St. Paul's prayers which are scattered throughout his Epistles you would have a lovely little prayer-book. Take only one: Eph. iii. 14-20. You may be sure "It is the lips that speak to GOD that know best how to speak to men." This was the man who said, "The Son of God, Who loved me, and gave Himself for me." And if St. Paul were here now and we were to ask him, "What was it that changed you—tell us the golden secret of your life?" he would reply, "The Son of God loved me and gave Himself for me."<sup>1</sup>

It is said if you want to touch men's hearts to-day you must tell a story of sacrifice. I will tell you two: one from real life, the other from fiction. You may remember the calm devotion and self-sacrificing death of Mrs. Rogers, the stewardess of the *Stella*. When the steamer was sinking off the Channel Islands she gave out all the life-belts to the affrighted women, and aided them to take their places in the boat; and, refusing to overcrowd that boat by entering it, with a prayer on her lips sank herself in the surging sea. Of all the stories of Charles Dickens the one that impresses us most is *A Tale of Two Cities*, a masterpiece of that kind of literature, in which a man gave up his life for a friend, took his place in prison and on the scaffold. Sidney Carton went to the guillotine to save the life of the husband of the lady he too loved. He was young: life was sweet, death was bitter, but Sidney Carton thought of her and her husband and child and father, and he was glad to die.

<sup>1</sup> "Men say it is wonderful that God in Christ should come and suffer and die. So it is, if God were some great heathen Jupiter; but if God is the Father that Christ showed Him to be, then it is no wonder—nay, the wonder would be that, being a Father, He could be content not to suffer for His children."—PHILLIPS BROOKS.

Dickens adds: "They said of him, about the city that night, that it was the peace fullest man's face ever beheld there. Many added that he looked sublime and prophetic."

"The Son of God . . . Who loved me and gave himself for me." "There rises before us the vision of a Face full of pity and of pain, pleading with a look that almost breaks the heart of the man who sees it."<sup>1</sup>

"See there, my LORD, upon the Tree,  
I hear, I feel, He died for me."<sup>2</sup>

A clergyman was taking his holiday in the Highlands of Scotland. There was no church for miles, so he asked a farmer to give him the use of his kitchen for a Sunday service. The farmer consented, and published the news far and wide. The people came in numbers from all round. They filled the kitchen and the courtyard outside. Just before the service the clergyman asked if all were present. "Yes," said the farmer, "all except the idiot boy, and it's no use calling him in." "Call him in," said the clergyman, and a lad came in about sixteen years of age. "My boy," said the clergyman, "have you got a soul?" The lad stared vacantly and shook his head. Again the clergyman repeated the question, this time placing his hand gently on the boy's shoulder. A strange look passed over the boy's face. A new light shone in his eyes, and looking up he said, "I had one once, sir, but they told me that the Lord Jesus bought it with His Own Blood, so I gave it back to Him to keep for me."

Certainly to St. Paul the Death of Christ was the sole ground of his hope. He would have said—

"I want no other argument,  
I have no other plea,  
It is enough that Jesus died,  
And that He died for me."

And the Death of Christ was the great inspiration of

<sup>1</sup> Hugh Black.

<sup>2</sup> Certainly if any men ought to know the way to Calvary preachers ought. Above all others they should feel the rapture and surprise of sinners saved by grace alone.

his service for God and man. It was the Golden Secret. "The sea grows always bigger," said Tintoretto in his old age. So St. Paul was always seeing new glories streaming from the Cross which gave him unutterable joy and peace.

# AN ESSAY ON SERMON-MAKING

(SPECIALLY INTENDED FOR LAY-PREACHERS)

THE only right way to begin the preparation of a Sermon is the way in which Milton began his work—"By devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit, Who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge. . . ." Preachers who so begin, continue, and end their work for the pulpit, on their knees before an open Bible, may humbly claim the fulfilment of God's most gracious Promise to Moses, "I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say" (Exodus iv. 12). Savonarola knelt so constantly before his Bible till it became not only a book but a window, and he began to see visions. And you will certainly see, if your eyes are opened, the Picture of the Incarnate Word in the written Word. And by God's grace, you will be the means of making others see the blessed Picture too.

Bishop Whipple on a certain occasion recalled one of his earliest experiences. He had preached a philosophical sermon of which he was very proud, when a leading Judge sent for him and said, "Never preach that sermon again. Remember that I am a sinner, and that I am lost unless I find my Saviour. If you tell the Story of the Cross so that your people may get nearer to Christ, then you will have a profitable ministry." And the Bishop went on to say that the keynote and burden of every sermon should be Jesus Christ and Him crucified; and he added, "That did not involve the neglect of learning, for he knew of no learning that could not be brought to the foot of the Cross." If we would "teach and preach Jesus Christ" it must be as He is revealed in the Bible. We want more expository preaching—more unfolding of those "sweet and awful" Scriptures.<sup>1</sup> We

<sup>1</sup> If I may be allowed a personal reminiscence, I would say I owe my soul to the teaching of Philip Browne, who was incumbent of St. James', Edgbaston, Birmingham, from 1852 to 1884. It was in his Church and through his preaching I hope the Good Shepherd found me when I was a boy of fifteen.



want to read new messages in the old Word. We want "thoughts that breathe and words that burn," and we shall find them in the Two Testaments. It is well sometimes to preach from a paragraph or even a whole book, and not always from a single text. In this way we may hope that God's Holy Spirit will make almost the entire Bible in some little degree luminous to our people. When the Puritan Pilgrims were about to leave the shores of Holland, and go forth carrying a new England to the other side of the Atlantic, Pastor Robinson addressed them in these striking words:—"Brethren, we are quickly to part from one another, and whether I may ever live to see your face on earth the God of heaven only knows. But whether the Lord has appointed that or not, I charge you before God and His holy angels that you follow me no farther than you have seen me follow the Lord Jesus Christ. If God reveal anything to you by any other instrument of His, be as ready to receive it as ever you were to receive any truth by my ministry. *For I am verily persuaded that the Lord hath more truth yet to break forth out of His Holy Word.*"

Bishop Thorold thought that the chief aims in a sermon should be (1) definiteness; (2) order; (3) lucidity; (4) proportion; (5) compactness; (6) attractiveness. Of course preaching of this kind is not easy. Ruskin pointed out that a part of the beauty of a column or statue or picture is found in the amount of work it contains. "The Column of the Apprentice" in Roslin Chapel, Scotland, so laboriously and beautifully carved, is an illustration of this. Here are some extracts from the *Life and Letters of Phillips Brooks* :—

"There was always a curious interest among the clergy and theological students who cultivated the art of preaching to know the methods by which Mr. Brooks did his work. The sense of form, the literary charm, the

He took an extraordinary amount of pains with his sermons, and I doubt if tenderer words to children ever passed human lips since Christ spoke to the boys and girls of Palestine. He was, moreover, a magnificent reader. Mr. Shorthouse said Mr. Spooner, the then Vicar of Edgbaston, was the best reader in Birmingham. I wonder whether he ever heard Mr. Browne.—Philip Browne might have sat for the picture in the Interpreter's House. So what more need be said?

almost prodigal abundance of thought and illustration, the spontaneity which made a written sermon possess the full effect of an extemporaneous utterance inspired by the moment,—this called for explanation, if so be that he could communicate to others the valued secret. Now that we know the entire process, the secret appears a simple one. Preaching was the one exclusive object that occupied his mind. The message to be delivered and the form it should take in order to be most effective—to that simple end he devoted himself. From morning till night, in every hour of leisure or apparent relaxation, on his journeys, in vacations, in social assemblies, he was thinking of subjects for sermons, turning over new aspects of old truths, thrilled inwardly with the possibility of giving better form than had yet been given to old, familiar doctrine. In a word, he concentrated his thought upon one thing—it was preaching; that was what he lived for, and for that cause he might almost be said to have come into the world.” (Vol. ii. pp. 103, 104.)

“His admiration for precious stones was noticeable, as shown in his sermons, where the simile of the jewel often occurs, and becomes the occasion of beautiful description.” (Vol. ii. p. 766.)

“A lady once heard him . . . and when asked about the sermon, remarked that it was not so good as some she had heard from him, but that she carried away from it one impression—his deep, overpowering love for his congregation. On hearing this, he was affected to tears, and remarked that he would rather that should be said of him than anything else.” (Vol. ii. p. 814).

Here is an extract from a Sermon by him on St. Matthew xi. 28 :—

“There is a sermon possible (would God that I could preach it!) which should cause everything else to be forgotten, and set the Saviour in the abundance of His power, in the completeness of His love, before the faces of men weary and troubled and distressed, finding it hard to live, often overcome by what seems the impossibility of living truly and bravely; and make them hear Him say to them, ‘Come unto Me!’—a sermon which should feel the Infinite sympathy of the words and of the soul from which they came—a sermon which should reveal

to somebody that there is a Heart which pities him, and which can satisfy him—a sermon which should leave the hearer, when it closed, in full communion with the soul of Christ, and with the new Divine life joyously begun. Who would not give anything to preach that sermon !”

With regard to George Macdonald—“His method of sermon-making shows a careful and accurate study of the original text and a complete understanding of the context. The special point of the sermon was the unfolding of the heart of an idea, the innermost meaning of the passage. There is no ingenious tapping of the text to see into what three or four apt fragments it can fall. There is not the clever and artistic construction of the discourse such as Robertson of Brighton shows. But there is always the logical progress of thought, by which some germ of truth is developed and grows into bud, blossom, and fruit. The mechanical process of growth seldom appears ; the idea is expanded rather than expatiated upon.”<sup>1</sup>

The Preacher of the true Gospel is sent by One Who has compassion. “The Son of the Blessed is very pitiful.” A certain notable clergyman was seized with a serious illness. The window of the sick-room looked out to the street, and one morning there were passing, as usual, many of his people to their work. The clergyman looked at them : his eyes filled with tears : and he exclaimed, “*Now* I could preach !” His former preaching he did not deem preaching at all. It lacked *sympathy*. But his course was ended. He never rose from that bed. “I cannot understand how it is your people will bear such plain preaching,” was once said to another clergyman. The answer was a simple one : “It is because they know I love them.” Never forget it is with the golden key of love God’s Holy Spirit opens the golden gates of the human heart.

Preaching is hard work. I remember the sermons I used to hear at St. James’, Edgbaston, when I was a boy. Mr. Browne gave his heart and his mind to his pulpit preparation, and of course he was right. Genius has been defined as “the capacity for taking pains.”

<sup>1</sup> *George Macdonald*, by Joseph Johnson.

Whether that is quite correct or no, I imagine it is not; it is certainly true that to produce a good Sermon honest toil is required. In the old cathedrals the sculptors did their work just as beautifully and just as elaborately in places out of sight as in those exposed to every-day vision, because they loved their work. That was the secret. Let us be sure we love ours. And let us always remember as Dr. Landels once "emphatically declared that only by sweat of brain and heart could Sermons be produced able to move men towards God and heaven." But then, the man who has a pulpit of his own, what more can he want?

Yes, preaching is hard work. "My dear sir," said Turner the painter to a critic, "if you only knew how difficult it is to paint even a decent picture, you would not say the severe things that you do of those who fail." The same may be said of Sermons as well as pictures. Dr. Blair said, "A dry Sermon cannot be a good one." I have no doubt he was right. There ought to be simplicity, variety, freshness, and vivid illustration in our pulpit addresses. The whole Sermon should hang well together. Everything should be relevant. "Drive one nail at a time."

Preachers of thirty years ago used to divide their Sermons into two or three parts, and then the great divisions probably had several subdivisions. No doubt these were too many, but we have gone to the other extreme, and as a rule eschew them altogether. This seems to be a mistake, for three or four plain divisions prevent confusion of thought and are a help to memory. I think there ought to be variety. Ships are driven into harbour by different winds. It is often extremely difficult to get good divisions. [Of course you will never fall into the mistake of taking a single word for your Text.]

I lately read a Sermon by Dr. W. M. Macgregor on St. John viii. 56. The title of the Sermon is, "Gladness in all Tenses." First, he re-translated the text—"Abraham exulted because he was to see My day; and from where he lives in God he has seen it and rejoiced." The preacher said: "He sheds gladness all about Him; in old times men rejoiced in the assurance that He was on His way, and those to whom He came rejoiced that



He was with them ; and men and women, after nineteen hundred years, rejoice to-day in every thought of Him. Thus there is gladness in all tenses . . .”

Mr. Greenhough has a Sermon on Romans viii. 28, and he begins :

“A preacher who takes this text ought to begin with a prayer and an apology. A prayer for light, and an apology for presuming to think that he can deal with it.”

Note these striking divisions of St. John iii. 16—I believe by Dr. Maclaren :

The Lake—God so loved the world,  
The River—that He gave His only-begotten Son,  
The Pitcher—that whosoever believeth in Him,  
The Draught—shall have everlasting life.

A Sermon by Dr. W. M. Taylor on Exodus xxxii. 24, “And there came out this calf,” begins, “Oh, Aaron, how could you say that?”

In *The Year of our Lord*, on the Text, “This Man receiveth sinners,” these are the very happy divisions : He receives them into His Heart to be forgiven, into His School to be trained, and into His Home (to be comforted for evermore). I owe them to my helpful friend, the Rev. N. A. Garland, the late vicar of Brixton.

Here is an account of a Sermon by a Puritan preacher in *The Holy War*—“His text was this : ‘Cut it down ; why cumbereth it the ground ?’ And a very smart Sermon he made upon the place. First, he showed what was the occasion of the Words, namely, because the fig-tree was barren ; then he showed what was contained in the sentence, namely, repentance, or utter desolation. He then showed also, by Whose authority this sentence was pronounced, and that was by Shaddai Himself. And lastly, he showed the reasons of the point, and then concluded his Sermon. But he was very pertinent in the application, insomuch that he made poor Mansoul tremble.”

It is sometimes asked, May a Sermon be repeated ? Why not ? Horace wrote, “*Lectio quae placuit, decies repetita placebit*” (“Reading which has once pleased, ten times repeated will please”). If our Sermons are



studded with the Praises of Christ, (as they ought to be), though the lamp is earthen, the flame will be golden, shedding light and gladness around, and the people will be glad to hear them again. Chalmers was asked to what he attributed his success in preaching, and he replied, "Repetition." The same great preacher and great organiser, (they are seldom combined, but he was both), said one Sermon a week was amply sufficient for the man of genius, learning, and industry. I do not mean it to be inferred from this that there is too much preaching in our Churches,—I think there is too little, but there is too much by the same man.<sup>1</sup> This, however, is a large subject, and I must not further discuss it here.

Of course preaching should be practical. Religion must be brought into daily life : it must be heart-deep ; it must be life-wide. The Epistle to the Colossians begins in Heaven, and ends in the home. A man in the East End of London once said to a Clergyman there, "You make religion too hard. Why, you preach to me as though I was all soul and no body, when I know and feel every day of my life that I have got a body, and it has claims upon me that I can't set aside." Do not fall into that mistake.

You will sometimes feel weary and discouraged. Here is an extract from a Sermon by the late Dr. Walter C. Smith of Edinburgh—"How stale and wearisome our preaching often is, no one feels more keenly than the preacher himself. You fancy, probably, that it is now and then an infliction on you, and perhaps you take some credit to yourself that you endure it patiently week after week. If you knew how we often look on it, how the full heart that is yearning to save your souls mourns over its miserable efforts, and is full of self-reproach often, self-contempt often, because its nets are so old and torn and rent and worthless ! It is not you I blame, but myself, when I see how fruitless my work is, and think how Christ did His, and how poorly I do mine."

<sup>1</sup> John Bright, in writing to a young man just beginning his work said—"Nothing that I can think of would induce me to undertake to address the same audience once a week for a year."

Our Text-Book is the Bible : 66 Books which a mysterious unity binds together. The writers were various : Moses, brought up in Pharaoh's court ; poets like David, Isaiah, Ezekiel ; Asaph, a chorister ; another a herdsman, another a vinedresser, another a fisherman, another a tax-gatherer, another a physician. Some were cultured like St. Paul, others had little of this world's learning. In this Book are histories, songs, prayers, Parables ; some pages sparkle with humour, others are blood-red with pathos. Now why do I believe the Bible contains the Revelation of GOD ? Where is the proof ? Why is this Book unlike every other book ? The answer is, The Bible contains the Revelation of God, because the human heart finds there what it can find nowhere else. Its Message awakens a response in the soul. The key fits the lock, because the key was made for the lock.

You probably find a great difficulty about the early chapters of Genesis. You must remember that the Bible is oriental Literature. The Oriental thinks and speaks in poetry, and the teacher must speak to the scholar in his own way if he wishes him to understand. So the third chapter of Genesis represents in parable or allegory great truths, true not only in the experience of Adam and Eve, but true in the experience of all to whom the Holy Spirit has given any sense of sin. The Fall which affects every child of man, must be traced to a fall in the primitive age. Our first parents were dupes, for the Tempter made things appear different to what they really were. Eden was wrung from them by deceit and lies, and stolen by a trick. Whenever man is by grace awakened to his moral condition he realises his fall, and discovers that there is no health in him. The forbidden fruit, the suggestions of the tempter, the lust of the eye, or the lust of the flesh, or the pride of life, the plunge of the soul into sin, the awful awakening in the Presence of God,—there is no need to ask, is this literal history ? because the chapter plainly paints in pictorial language man's experience of sin in a form in which it can be understood by all races and all ages. Orientals are born story-tellers ; it is their every-day way of thinking and speaking. The Bible proclaims in letters of fire that the devil is a cheat

and a murderer. The talking serpent talks still, and woe worth the day that we listen to him. "God does not pay at the end of every week," (as Anne of France said to Richelieu), "but in the end *He pays*."

With regard to the moral difficulties of the Old Testament, of course the ethical standards even of good people were 3000 years ago lower than they are to-day, and Christ had not come to teach men to be merciful. And even where the difficulty seems to be in the Revelation itself, or where it appears to us that unworthy conceptions of God are introduced, we must not forget that God teaches progressively as men are able to learn, and Christ Himself corrected and revised certain parts of the Old Testament. It has been well said, "The Higher Critic has compelled us to build our faith where and as the early Church built hers—on Christ, and Christ alone."<sup>1</sup>

There is one certain gain from the Biblical criticism of the last fifty years, which is that we do not consider all parts of the Bible have equal value as revelations of God. To Christ the Old Testament was all sacred, but He had His favourite Books—Deuteronomy, some of the Psalms, the latter part of Isaiah. Take the Bible of the most saintly person you ever knew, perhaps your own mother, some places are specially marked, and brown with constant use,—a few of the early chapters in the Old Testament, a great many of the Psalms, a good deal of Isaiah, and probably some other chapters and verses of the Old Testament. Then in the New Testament, outside the Gospels, you will find some places well-worn and well-marked, but you cannot help seeing that the owner of that Bible loved the Words of Christ best of all. For indeed, (to quote Mr. Clow again), "The greatest Revelation is not a Book, but a Man, not a Holy Scripture dimly prophesying, and artlessly narrating, but a living Lord, Who is the Truth, as well as the Way and the Life."

The Rev. J. Alford Davies well says: "Old sermons may seem to us very dry; they may make us wonder how they could be listened to by the hour. They were more theological than ours. But there was one thing in which they were especially strong, and that was in their

<sup>1</sup> Rev. W. M. Clow.

appeal. The old preachers drove the truth home. Their approved plan of a sermon was introduction, exposition, and application. In the introduction the preacher put the arrow on the string; in the exposition he aimed it; in the application he drew the string, and sent the arrow, whizzing, straight home to its mark. Now, it is in the application that we sometimes fail to-day. The peroration is almost one of the lost arts of modern oratory and preaching . . . we do not always drive our lesson home. We sometimes think it enough to tell the truth, whereas we ought to try and make the truth tell. That is what the true preacher wants. His aim is not to speak for half-an-hour; that is comparatively easy through practice. It is not simply to speak the truth for half-an-hour. It is to speak the truth with effect. How to make the truth a living influence, so that our hearers will go away eager and anxious and constrained to live it. That is the question. Men went away from the old orators saying of their orations, 'How beautiful!' but when they had heard Demosthenes, they departed, saying, 'Away to fight Philip!' Such is the result that the true preacher labours and yearns for!" This is very true. There ought to be an "application" at the end of every Sermon. But after all, let us ever remember OUR NEED OF THE HOLY SPIRIT TO APPLY GOD'S WORD TO THE HEART. It was said of Dr. Hood Wilson of the Barclay Church, that he spoke to you as if there were no one else in Edinburgh.

John the Baptist preached a very brief Sermonette, for it only consisted of five words: "BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD!" Yet by it five men were won for the Saviour. Andrew and John the Evangelist were the first. Then Andrew finds Peter. Then Andrew and Peter tell Philip the golden secret. And Philip finds Nathanael. Only five words, but *five words applied by the Holy Spirit.*

[One of the most helpful set of books I know are the works of James Hamilton, D.D. There are six volumes, and they were published by Messrs. Nisbet, and can now only be had second hand. I write from memory, but I think it was of James Hamilton that it was said, that his preaching was good, his writing was better, and his life was best.]

## INDEX OF TEXTS

	PAGE		PAGE
Genesis xxxii. 26 . . .	66	St. Luke ii. 25 . . .	6
Psaln xxxvii. 3 . . .	86	„ xi. 21, 22 . . .	15
„ lxiii. 8 . . .	98	„ xxiv. 15 . . .	42
„ cxlv. 10. . . .	70	St. John vii. 46 . . .	27
St. Matt. vi. 21 . . .	53	„ viii. 12 . . .	12
„ viii. 11 . . .	56	„ xv. 7 . . .	24
„ xii. 21 . . .	90	„ xv. 13 . . .	74
„ xxi. 37 . . .	17	„ xx. 15 . . .	39
„ xxvi. 75 . . .	1	„ xxi. 22 . . .	50
„ xxvii. 19 . . .	31	Acts iii. 6 . . .	60
„ xxvii. 36 . . .	35	„ iv. 33 . . .	82
St. Mark iii. 14 . . .	95	„ xvi. 13 . . .	77
„ v. 41 . . .	21	2 Cor. vi. 10 . . .	101
„ vi. 31 . . .	63	Galatians ii. 20 . . .	105
„ vi. 34 . . .	92	Revelation i. 18 . . .	45





# INDEX

- ALEXANDER, Archbishop, 12, 55, 60  
 Andrewes, Bishop, 3, 44  
 Arnold, Matthew, 13, 62, 103  
 Arnot, W., 83  
 Augustine, St., 47, 67, 83  
  
 BARBAULD, Mrs., 7  
 Baxter, Richard, 47  
 Beecher, Henry Ward, 65  
 Bray, William, 103  
 Brooks, Phillips, Bishop, 37, 89, 95,  
 106, 110, 111  
 Browne, Philip, 109, 110, 112  
 Browning, Robert, 4, 6, 41, 50, 73  
 Bruce, 24  
 Buddha, 57  
 Bunyan, John, 3, 9, 32, 54, 84, 95,  
 103, 114  
 Butler, Josephine, 83, 84  
  
 CATACOMBS, the, 46, 47  
 Chalmers, Dr., 36, 115  
 Christ, the great Consoler, 7  
 — the Light of the world, 12  
 — the Deliverer, 12  
 — the Birth of, 17  
 — the power of His Word, 23  
 — the world's greatest Teacher,  
 27, 72  
 — the Resurrection of, 39  
 — the Ascension of, 53  
 — the Impregnable Rock, 90  
 — the Compassion of, 92 ff.  
 — the necessity for preaching, 109  
 Church, Dean, 15, 16  
 Clow, W. M., 14, 43, 117  
 Cowper, 42, 64, 71, 88  
 Correggio, 14  
 Cross, the meaning of, 35 ff.  
  
 DICKENS, Charles, 29, 102, 106,  
 107  
 Donne, John, 9  
 Dora, Sister, 61  
 Drummond, Henry, 84, 85  
  
 ELIOT, George, 16  
 Epistles, the, reproducing and inter-  
 preting Christ's Teaching, 97  
  
 FATHERHOOD OF GOD, 30, 106  
 Fullerton, W., 17  
 Fleming, Canon, 91  
 Francis of Assisi, 103  
  
 GARIANI, N. A., 1  
 Gibbon, 56  
 Goethe, 1  
 Gordon, General, 60  
 Grace, 82 ff.  
 Green, J. R., 2  
 Greenough, J. G., 1, 11, 111  
 Greenwell, Dora, 42, 43, 49  
  
 HENRY, Matthew, 37  
 Herbert, George, 1, 37, 38  
 Hoffman's *Cardinal*, 1  
 Hogg, Quintin, 94  
 Hogg, Victor, 48  
 Hunt, Holman, 1  
 Hymns, Olney, 103, 104  
  
 JOHNSON, Samuel, 26, 34, 75  
 Jowett, Benjamin, 3  
  
 KELLS, 7, 71  
 Kelvin, Lord, 91  
 Ken, Bishop, 76  
 Kingsley, Charles, 47, 87, 88  
 Knox, 29  
  
 LAW, William, 16, 35, 72  
 Livingstone, 58, 59, 77  
 Longfellow, 73  
 Lowell, 98  
 Luke, St., 6  
  
 MACDONALD, George, 47, 53, 70,  
 112  
 Maclaren, Dr., 55, 58, 114  
 Macleod, Alexander, 96

Macgregor, W. M., 113  
 Matheson, George, 16  
 M'Cheyne, 54  
 Miller, J. C., 35  
 Milton, 82  
 Missions, 56 *ff.*  
 Moule, Bishop, 48

NEWMAN, 79  
 Nightingale, Florence, 94

PETER, St., restoration of, 2  
 Pigou, Dean, 8  
 Prothero, Rowland E., 98, 99

QUINCEY, De, 51

REVERENCE, 33  
 Robertson, F. W., 96, 97, 112  
 Robinson, Pastor, 110  
 Rosebery, Lord, 26, 91  
 Ruskin, 9, 33, 110

SABBATH, the blessed, 79  
 Savonarola, 38, 96, 109  
 Shakespeare, 29, 30, 66, 99

Sidey, W. W., 10, 11, 25, 97  
 Simeon, Charles, 81  
 South, 74  
*Spirit, the Holy*, our need of, 8, 81,  
     97, 118  
 Stevenson, R. L., 102  
 Stubbs, Bishop, 51

THACKERAY, 19, 43, 44, 54  
 Thomas à Kempis, 12, 45, 51, 53,  
     75  
 Thorold, Bishop, 110  
 Trench, Archbishop, 12, 67

VAUGHAN, Henry, 79, 80  
 Vaughan, James, 24, 92  
 Virgil, 20

WESTCOTT, Bishop, 40, 56  
 Whipple, Bishop, 109  
 Whitfield, 73  
 Whittier, 19  
 Wilberforce, Bishop, 16, 57, 58  
 Wordsworth, 71

XAVIER, Francis, 103

THE END

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